

# THE REAL JESUS

Disciple-making Series | Book 4

Adam Grill

# THE REAL JESUS

Disciple-making Series | Book 4

*The Real Jesus | Book 4*

© 2026 by Adam Grill, D.D.

Published by Family Church

10717 Adams St.

Holland, MI 49423

ISBN 979-8-9989436-3-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Except where noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible: New International Version (NIV) 2015. All rights reserved.

Cover image: © inhauscreative | canva.com

Cover and book design: Family Church

# CONTENTS

<b>CONTENTS</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
<b>HOW TO USE THIS BOOK</b> . . . . .	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER 72</b> . . . . .	<b>7</b>
FIVE REASONS NOT TO WORRY.	
<b>CHAPTER 73</b> . . . . .	<b>14</b>
SUNDAY'S WORSHIP TESTED BY MONDAY'S LIFE	
<b>CHAPTER 74</b> . . . . .	<b>23</b>
THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES	
<b>CHAPTER 75</b> . . . . .	<b>31</b>
THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT	
<b>CHAPTER 76</b> . . . . .	<b>38</b>
JOY THROUGH DIFFICULTY	
<b>CHAPTER 77</b> . . . . .	<b>44</b>
WHAT WAS THE WORK OF JESUS?	
<b>CHAPTER 78</b> . . . . .	<b>50</b>
THE GREAT BETRAYAL: JUDAS	
<b>CHAPTER 79</b> . . . . .	<b>58</b>
THE GREAT BETRAYAL: PETER	
<b>CHAPTER 80</b> . . . . .	<b>65</b>
THE GREAT BETRAYAL: THE JEWISH PEOPLE	
<b>CHAPTER 81</b> . . . . .	<b>73</b>
JESUS ABANDONED	
<b>CHAPTER 82</b> . . . . .	<b>80</b>
JESUS' DEATH: I'LL BE BACK	
<b>CHAPTER 83</b> . . . . .	<b>89</b>
1 <sup>ST</sup> RESURRECTION EYEWITNESSES	
<b>CHAPTER 84</b> . . . . .	<b>99</b>
2 <sup>ND</sup> RESURRECTION EYEWITNESSES	
<b>CHAPTER 85</b> . . . . .	<b>106</b>
3 <sup>RD</sup> & 4 <sup>TH</sup> RESURRECTION APPEARANCES	

<b>CHAPTER 86</b> . . . . .	<b>112</b>
5TH & 6TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCES	
<b>CHAPTER 87</b> . . . . .	<b>117</b>
7TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCE	
<b>CHAPTER 88</b> . . . . .	<b>124</b>
8TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCE	
<b>CHAPTER 89</b> . . . . .	<b>132</b>
9TH & 10TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCES	
<b>CHAPTER 90</b> . . . . .	<b>138</b>
11TH & 12TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCES	
<b>CHAPTER 91</b> . . . . .	<b>146</b>
13TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCE	
<b>CHAPTER 92</b> . . . . .	<b>157</b>
OUR JOB!	
<b>FROM PASTOR ADAM</b> . . . . .	<b>162</b>
<b>NOTES</b> . . . . .	<b>163</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the end of *The Real Jesus* series!

Over the past books, we've walked step by step through the life, ministry, and message of Jesus Christ. We've seen His compassion, His miracles, His challenges to the religious systems of His day. And now, in this final book, we come to the moment that defines our calling as His followers—the moment when Jesus handed His mission to us.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He left His disciples with one final charge: “*go and make disciples of all nations...*” (Matthew 28:19). These words are not just for pastors or missionaries. They are for every believer. Every person who claims to know and follow Jesus has the same job—to make more disciples of Jesus Christ. This is our purpose. This is our privilege.

But what does that look like today?

How do we “go” in a world that's distracted, divided, and often uninterested in spiritual truth?

How do ordinary people—students, parents, workers, retirees—live as disciple-makers?

That's what this book is about. You'll discover that Jesus gave us everything we need: His authority, His Spirit and His example. Through passages from the Gospels and Acts, we'll see how the first followers carried out their mission and how we can continue it today.

My prayer is that as you read, you will:

See Jesus more clearly.

Hear His calling more personally.

And respond more boldly.

This is not the end of *The Real Jesus* journey—it's the beginning of your journey alongside Jesus in making disciples! Because Jesus' final words weren't meant to close a story. They were meant to start a movement.

Let's get to work—together!

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



### READ & DISCUSS

I encourage you to read and discuss this book with another person or with a small group of people. This book was designed to be studied with one or more people because that was what Jesus modeled for us throughout His life here. This book is a simple tool to help anyone walk through Jesus' life chronologically and learn who the real Jesus was, is, and always will be.



### KEY PASSAGES

Each chapter has specific Bible passages to read. Let me encourage you to buy or download a copy of the Bible to read as we go on this journey together. All the passages quoted in this book are from the New International Version. I would also suggest buying a copy of Thomas & Gundry's *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels*, which pulls out all the Bible passages about Jesus' life and puts them in chronological order for you.



### READ

Read those passages in your Bible or *Harmony of the Gospels* before continuing with the book. You will also find parts of the Bible sprinkled throughout the book. Every time I directly quote the Bible, those words will be in *red italics*. This is done to help you distinguish God's Word from mine. You will also see that whenever God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are referenced (He, Him, They, Me, My, etc.), it will always begin with a capital letter because it helps remind us that we are referring to God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.



## WEEKLY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When you gather, I encourage you to begin EACH SESSION with the same three questions. We do this to help you get to know your disciples personally and to become aware of what is happening in their lives. Start with these questions every time:

- What is one thing you are most thankful for since we last met?
- What is one thing that stressed you out most since we last met?
- What did you do to follow through on your last “I will” statements?



## LIFE APPLICATION

At the end of every chapter, there will be a Life Application section. There, you will find one question that is unique to each chapter and two questions that are the same. Honest answers are always best. The questions help generate conversation and help you consider how to apply Jesus’ life to your daily life.

Discuss your answers to all three questions when you get together. I encourage you to write your disciple’s “I will” statements in your book next to their names. That way, when you meet, you can ask them how they did at following up on their “I will” statement.



## LEADING OTHERS

There are several ways to walk through this book with others, depending on how much your disciples want to read each week. The two methods we have seen work the best are:

- Read one chapter a week and meet weekly or bi-weekly. When you gather, start with prayer and the opening questions. Then,

- talk through the highlights you and your disciples recall from the chapter. Next, have everyone share how they answered the Life Application questions. Pray together and schedule your next time to meet.
- Read one chapter daily and gather weekly or bi-weekly to discuss. When you gather, start with prayer and the opening questions. Then, talk through everyone's single big takeaway from each chapter read. Next, share how everyone answered the Life Application questions. Pray together and schedule your next time to meet.

## CHAPTER 72

# FIVE REASONS NOT TO WORRY.



John 14:1-18

As a pastor, I am privileged to be at many of the most significant moments in people's lives. I am there when they get married, when their baby is dedicated, when their kids want to give their lives to Jesus and be baptized, for graduations, and to witness their kids' weddings. However, as a pastor, I am also present during the most difficult times in people's lives: when they lose a job, lose a loved one, or are close to death. Assuming the person dying still has a clear mind as they approach the end of their life, you discover what they truly believe.

In the following few chapters, I will share some famous last words of people who had an impact on our world and then contrast them with the last words or teachings of Jesus.

Leonardo Da Vinci, known for painting the Mona Lisa and The Last Supper, said, "I have offended God and mankind, because my work did not reach the quality it should have."

Leonard Nimoy, who played the famous Doctor Spock in *Star Trek*, tweeted, "A life is like a garden. Perfect moments can be had, but not preserved, except in memory."

Most Biblical scholars believe that John 13-17 took place in the upper room, the same place where the Last Supper occurred. Immediately after the Last Supper, Jesus began his final teachings for His core disciples. You might consider these His famous last words. Even though what He taught His disciples occurred thousands of years ago, the teachings are still relevant to us.



John 14:1-18

Jesus said that He and the Father are a team. Together, They will

help us overcome any unholy turmoil in our souls and give us the strength to continue fighting the good fight. Jesus does this by calling us to place our trust in Them. Then He gave us five reasons why we could and should stop worrying.

Remember, this talk took place on the heels of the Last Supper. Jesus told His disciples at the Last Supper that He was going away and that they could not follow Him. He told Peter that He would deny Jesus before the night was over. In other words, Jesus told them He was leaving, and Peter wasn't even going to make it through one night without Him. Jesus' leaving was ample reason for all of the disciples at the table to be troubled.

And so, it is no wonder that Jesus began with: <sup>1</sup> *“Do not let your hearts be troubled”*... Instead, trust God and Me. To which it is appropriate to ask, “Why shouldn't I be troubled?” Why shouldn't they be troubled if Jesus was leaving? Why shouldn't we all be worried when it doesn't seem like Jesus is there for us? Why should we trust God when life isn't easy? Why should we trust in God when life is going badly?

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus provides us with five reasons to leave our worries behind and to trust in Him. We do not worry because God's house has enough rooms for all of us!

Jesus said: <sup>2</sup> *“My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that, I am going there to prepare a place for you?”*

Let this first reason for faith sink in. God's house is large. It has many rooms. His children live with Him in His house. It is very spacious. You don't need to worry that God doesn't have room for you or those you love. There is a room designed for each of us, even Peter, who will soon fail Jesus miserably.

If you trust in Jesus, even when you fail Him and fall short (and we all do) and even when you feel like God will never forgive you (and we all have those moments), you still have a place in God's home. And that is pretty incredible!

I can hear Jesus saying, “Yes, I’m leaving. No, you can’t come with me now. You will be scattered tonight. But don’t let your sorrow, your fear, your shame, or your failure produce an unholy turmoil in your soul. Let not your heart be troubled. Trust Me. Trust God. There will be a place for you in my Father’s house because you are my Father’s children forever.”

**We do not worry because Jesus is preparing a place of dwelling for us with God.** Jesus said: <sup>2</sup> *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And 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. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

Twice, Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for you. Does it mean that things in heaven are in disrepair? Does it mean that something is defective and in need of improvement? Or does it mean something else? Is something not yet ready?

Jesus was not in heaven, and they were not there either. There was something yet to be done. That something was Jesus giving up His life so that all people could have their sins forgiven. For Jesus to prepare those rooms, He had to give up His life for us. Sin had to be paid for because sin is what separates us from God. Jesus was about to bear the curse of sin for us (Galatians 3:13), bear our condemnation (Romans 8:3), and endure the bruising of the Father (Isaiah 53:10). Death was yet to be defeated, and Jesus was about to give His life and take it back again from the jaws of death (John 10:18).

Every obstacle between us and our room in the Father’s house was about to be removed in the next three days. That’s what Jesus meant when He said, “I am going to prepare a place for you.” Jesus was saying our sin does not mean that our place in God’s household will be unavailable. Jesus was about to purchase our forgiveness and become the way to the Father and our place in

Heaven. Jesus alone makes a room not only available, but also **suitable** and **specific** for His redeemed followers. Let not your heart be troubled. Trust Jesus.

**We do not worry because Jesus will take us into heaven!**

Jesus said: <sup>3</sup> *“And 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.”* <sup>4</sup> *“You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

Don't miss what Jesus said in this passage. Jesus said He would **take you to be with Him where He is going**. Where was Jesus going? Back to heaven! So, when He says, <sup>3</sup> *“I go and prepare a place for you,”* He is saying, “I will go through death, for you, so that I am qualified to bring you into my Family! I must die. I must rise. I must be glorified. I must intercede for you. And when I have done that, then I will be ready to come and take you with Me.”

Those assurances from Jesus sound nice, but what about when real life hits? What about when that inner turmoil in my soul is so heavy I cannot breathe? How do I know right now what's best for my children, my marriage, my health, my job, my loneliness? I need help now, not sometime in the future!

Here is where Jesus takes a surprising turn in the passage: <sup>8</sup> *“Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’”* Philip didn't say, “Show us the Father someday.” He said, “Show us the Father, now, and we will be good. That will be enough to trust you.”

Hearing this, I imagine Jesus leaning back, rolling His neck, sighing, and wondering why Phillip did not pick up on what He just said. The emphasis in verses 7–11 is crystal clear. **Seven times**, Jesus said virtually the same thing: that He and the Father are so profoundly One, and when you are in His presence, you are in the presence of God the Father.

1. John 14:7 *“If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.”*
2. John 14:7 *“From now on, you do know him and have*

*seen him.”*

3. In response to Philip’s request to see the Father: <sup>9</sup> *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.”*
4. *John 14:9 “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”*
5. *John 14:10 “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?”*
6. *John 14:10 “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.”*
7. *John 14:11 “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.”*

**We do not worry because God is with us now!** Seven times in a row, Jesus stressed the same thing! Jesus wanted them to know He (God) was with them, and that was the “enough” they were looking for.

I am sure some of you are thinking, “Jesus was with them, but Jesus is *not* with me. I cannot talk to Jesus, touch Jesus, see Jesus, or feel Jesus, and so on.” That brings us to one last argument for why our hearts should not be troubled, afraid, or worried. And this time, Jesus had you very specifically in mind, not just His closest followers but you who are reading this right now.

**We do not worry because Jesus will be with us always through His Spirit!** To see this incredible promise, we need to drop down five verses. <sup>16</sup> *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

When the Helper, the Holy Spirit, came, Jesus came. When it says at the end of verse 17, *“he lives with you and will be in*

*you,” Jesus meant, I am with you now in you spiritually. I will be closer to you than ever before when the Holy Spirit comes. This is why Paul talked the way he did about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, in Romans 8: <sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.*

The Spirit of God dwells in you. The Spirit is Jesus, and Jesus is the Spirit, just like how Jesus is the Father and the Father is Jesus. The promise of the Holy Spirit is not some distant future event; this is now. Jesus has gone away physically so that He can be near all of His followers, not just His closest friends. He has not left you as an orphan; He has come to you. Right now, He is more interested in your parenting, marriage, singleness, failing health, job situation, or loneliness than you can imagine. He did not come as an observer but as a Helper to be a part of your life.

Let not your heart be troubled. Why?

Because Jesus has a place for you in His Father’s house.

Because Jesus prepared the place for you, He opened the way. He is the way.

Because Jesus Himself is your dwelling place, and He will come and take you to Himself.

Because Jesus and the Father are one so that if you have Jesus, you have the Father.

Because Jesus has come in the Holy Spirit, He is with you now and will be with you always, not as an observer but as your Helper.



## LIFE APPLICATION

- If you have given your life to Jesus, He is with you right now.



## CHAPTER 73

# SUNDAY'S WORSHIP TESTED BY MONDAY'S LIFE



John 14:15-24

Have you ever pondered what your last words might be? What do you think you will utter right before you die? That might seem like a morbid thing to consider. However, what I have found by being present at the end of life for many people is that what a person values most, or fears the most, is revealed in those final moments. I can admit it is drastically different to be there at the final moments for someone who is a believer and for someone who is not. It is a scary thing to be nearing the end of your life and admit you have no idea what is coming next.

If you are worried about what comes after this life, Jesus can help calm those fears. Remember, this book contains Jesus' final teachings, words spoken just before the most significant event and the greatest act of love.

Jesus' death and resurrection took on the sins of all humankind, so that everyone who truly believes in Him will be forgiven of all their sins and be welcome into the never-ending joy of eternal life!

Jesus' message was for them and us. It was His assurance that although He would die, He would live again, and that the Father would send us the Holy Spirit, who would come and live inside each believer!

Here are the final words of some other famous people that you can contrast with Jesus'.

Frank Sinatra, a famous American actor and singer in the 1940s, last spoke, "I'm losing..."

Steve Jobs, an American businessman best known for founding Apple, is heard saying: "Oh wow, oh wow, oh wow."

We will never know what Steve saw at that moment, but we do know he was not a believer. Earlier in Jobs' fight with cancer, he said, "At this moment, lying on a sick bed and recalling my whole life, I realize that all the recognition and wealth that I took so much pride in have paled and become meaningless in the face of impending death... You can employ someone to drive the car for you, make money for you, but you cannot have someone bear the sickness for you. Material things we lose can be found. But there is one thing that can never be found when it is lost... Life."



### John 14:15-24

No matter where we are or what is happening to us, if we truly believe the promises of the Bible, God will be there. <sup>15</sup> *"If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—"*

This promise of a gift is not a promise for all people of the world. God reserves this promise for His people alone. In verse 17, Jesus clarifies this as an exclusive promise: <sup>17</sup> *"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.* Not everyone in the world accepts Him, or sees the real Jesus, or knows the real Jesus! However, those of us who do know Him and are known by Him know that He lives within us!

Jesus continued explaining this amazing truth: <sup>18</sup> *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> 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?”*

It is clear from verses 17, 19, and 22 that the promised gift of help and love is something the world cannot see, does not know, is not given, and does not experience. Jesus’ promise is something so personal and so intimate that those who do not know God cannot see Him or receive Him. **God’s gift of the Holy Spirit is only for those who love God and keep God’s commandments.**

There are two keys to receiving these promises, according to Jesus.

First, you must love God.

Second, you must keep His commands, which means living according to God’s Word, not what culture may say.

Living according to God’s Word is easier said than done. God’s Word teaches us something very different from what we experience in our culture. It is HARD to go against the mainstream of society. That is the struggle many people in our country feel regarding topics such as COVID, LGBTQ+, gender fluidity, abortion, etc. Think of it this way—by Monday morning, real life is already testing what you learned through Sunday worship. Which aspects of your life really direct you – culture or God?

Clearly, in this passage, those who received these gifts were not simply people who claimed to be Christians or believers. Those who received these gifts were people repeatedly described as people who love Jesus and live like Jesus.

Jesus said: *15 “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—*

Jesus continues: *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.”* And in verse 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.”* This love is not a general love that God has for the world. This love is a personal, intimate, relational, affectionate, committed love from the Father, reserved for those who love Jesus. We read in Romans 5:8 that *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* God’s Word tells us that we do not need to be perfect, nor that He waited for us to love Him before He loved us!

Anyone who has ever been in love knows it is about more than what we say; our actions must align with our words. Anyone who has managed people or has had children knows the same thing. We do not expect our employees, or children, to say one thing and then do something very different. Jesus is saying the same thing, our “love” for God should be evident by the way we obey and keep His commands.

If we are honest, we all want to get something out of every relationship we have. So, what do we get from a relationship with Jesus? Long-term believers may be thinking, “You should just love God and not want anything.” That is true, but if you are thinking that, try to find any relationship you have where you invest 100% and expect nothing in return; you never get anything back. There is no such thing as a worldly relationship that is totally one-directional.

What does it mean to love Jesus? Jesus tells us four times that our love for Him should result in keeping His commandments in how we live.

Verse 15: *“If you love me, keep my commands.”*

Verse 21: *“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.”*

Verse 23: *“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”*

Verse 24: *“Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.”*

The first thing to notice is that loving Jesus is not the same as keeping His commandments. It starts with that special love, and

the outflow of that love that causes us to keep His commandments. Keeping His Word is the result of a genuine love for Jesus.

Let me give you the Pastor Adam Translation (PAT):

PAT John 14:15: “If you love me, the evidence will be you living out the things I told you to do in the Bible.”

PAT John 14:21: “Whoever knows and lives out my teachings from the Bible is the one who loves me.”

PAT John 14:23 & 24: “It is easy to know who does not love me, look at their life.”

Loving Jesus isn't simply doing good things; it's more than that. Loving Jesus is not a response to a need; it is the desire to be close to Him. It's treasuring Him, enjoying the study of His Word, learning to live like Him, and being content with all that He is. In short, loving Jesus is not a matter of doing good things versus bad. It's a matter of delighting in an excellent Savior. **To love Jesus genuinely is to try to become more like Him.**

Jesus tells us that doing excellent things (such as keeping His Word) comes from loving Him and striving to be more like Him. <sup>15</sup> *“If you love me, keep my commands.”* And what were these “commands” that Jesus had in mind? How many commands were there? What would it mean to live like Jesus, to become like Jesus, to love Jesus? Our minds can wander to many different places. I am sure many of you are thinking about moral behaviors you might need to fix.

If you read through the whole Gospel of John, specifically looking for moral behavior commandments, what will you find? You will find only two explicit commandments that you might call “moral behavior” commandments.

John 13:34-35 contains the command to love one another as Jesus loved us.

John 21:16 has the command to Peter to care for His sheep. Understand Jesus never said, “If you love me, you will keep my moral standards.” What Jesus said was:

<sup>15</sup> *“If you love me, keep my commands.”*

If you read through the Gospel of John again, not thinking about what moral changes you need in your life but instead looking for things Jesus commanded you to do, you will read:

- Receive me—John 1:12
- Follow me—John 1:43
- Get up—John 5:8
- Rise—John 11:43
- Believe in the light—John 12:36
- Believe in God—John 14:1
- Believe me—John 14:11
- Remain in me—John 15:4
- Ask whatever you wish—15:7
- Remain in my love—John 15:9
- Receive the Holy Spirit—John 20:22

Did you notice anything interesting about those commands? Did you see anything about morality? Did you notice anything in your life that needs to change? How do these commands help you understand Jesus’ call to obey in John 14:15, that if you love Him, you will keep His commands?

The commandments in the Gospel of John **overwhelmingly** say to receive, believe, ask, and remain. It makes perfect sense that Jesus would say, “If you love Me, if you desire Me, if you delight in Me, if you treasure Me, then you will receive Me, and believe Me, and remain in Me.”

In other words, if you have been born again and you honestly treasure Jesus above **everything**, then Jesus says you will be able to live like Him, and we will place Jesus’ lifestyle above all other things. If we truly trust Jesus for our present and our future, we will be able to live genuinely like Jesus. If we are born again and long to be with Jesus, we will remain in Him, and He will help us to live like Him.

What does it mean to love Jesus?

Loving Jesus means **treasuring** Him above all else.

Loving Jesus means **desiring** Him above all else.

Loving Jesus means **longing** for Him above all else.

Loving Jesus means **enjoying** Him above all else.

Loving Jesus means **being satisfied** in Him alone.

How do you know if you really love Jesus? Look above and ask yourself if those things describe your heart, mind, and soul's desires. Can you honestly say that you treasure Jesus above all your earthly treasures? Do you desire to study your Bible to grow in your knowledge? Do you long to pray and connect with God? Or is one hour on Sunday enough time to connect with your faith for the week?

Loving like Jesus is challenging, and it requires total commitment and a great deal of effort. Some of you have one foot in this 'Jesus thing' and one foot in the world, and you are debating which foot needs to move. Straddling the fence hurts, and fence straddlers won't be in Heaven.

You read some of Jesus' concluding words before His death. Jesus promised that if His followers pressed on and chose the more challenging road, then, and only then, would the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus be with them forever. This promise goes for us too. Remember, we are never alone; **the Holy Spirit will be with us forever to help us.**

The promise in this passage is that God will never forsake you or leave you. God will be with you no matter where you are. By loving Jesus and living like Jesus, He, the Creator of all space and time, will always be with you. What an incredible promise!

No one wants to be alone, and if you're walking with God, you never will be alone. Remember what Jesus said.

*<sup>15</sup> "If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> 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.”*

When Jesus spoke of the Advocate to His disciples, He meant the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth. The same Spirit poured out into the disciples after Jesus’ ascension is the same Spirit with you now, who will help open your mind and heart to glorious truths about Jesus. The Spirit will only reveal things to those who love Jesus, treasure Jesus, receive Jesus, and keep his commands.

At this point, one of the 12 disciples asked: *<sup>22</sup> Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”*

*And Jesus gave us a great answer. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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.”*

If you love Jesus **and** keep His words, **then** He will prepare a dwelling for you in heaven. That promise is also for us here on earth. If you keep Jesus’ commands, His Spirit will come, and you will be a dwelling place for God. Realize the Spirit of God lives inside His believers, and you have a power inside you that no one in all human history had before Jesus’ ascension to heaven! Realize that as you live into the life God has designed for you, God will be with you always! You will have everything you need to do the work that Jesus has called you to do.



## CHAPTER 74

# THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES



John 15:1-17

Before we dive into the key passage, let's read the famous last words of two more people.

Humphrey Bogart, an American actor and cultural icon of the 1940s and 50s: "I should never have switched from scotch to martinis."

Chris Farley, an American comedian and actor best known for his comedy sketches on *Saturday Night Live*, said, "Please don't leave me."

Have you been contrasting the famous last words of others with the words Jesus spoke to His disciples and to us? I hope that when you reach the end of your life, you will look back with joy at all the things God has done in and through you. I pray that you will pass away with joy, knowing you are about to walk into heaven and be welcomed by Jesus!

In this passage, known as the parable of the "Vine and the Branches," Jesus will very clearly describes and reveals the intimate nature of His followers' relationship with Him. He declares that <sup>5</sup>*"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* He explains that a fruitful spiritual life depends entirely on remaining or abiding in Him. Jesus calls His followers to bear lasting fruit as evidence of their efforts, to share in His mission and to remain in His love by keeping His commands.



John 15:1-17

I'm going to reverse the discussion in this chapter and start at the end of the passage instead of the beginning. I am doing this to

make sure you keep things in perspective as we walk through this passage.

Jesus ended by saying, <sup>16</sup> *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.*

You did not choose God. God chose you because He wants you to bear spiritual fruit for His Kingdom. This fruit isn't the type of fruit that is here today and gone tomorrow, but fruit that will last. This fruit grows as followers obey God's commands and love each other. Bearing eternal spiritual fruit is the goal—keep that in mind as we walk through this chapter.

In John 15, Jesus paints a picture of a believer's relationship with Him as He completes His work on earth and becomes the source of all life and spiritual fruitfulness. Now, let's jump back to the beginning. <sup>1</sup> *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>(a)</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful.*

In other words, Jesus is the vine. God the Father will tend the vine. God will see to it that the vine bears the spiritual fruit God intended. In the same way, God's attention shifts to the branches, meaning those who follow Jesus, to make sure we keep bearing fruit just like Jesus did. God is the gardener who tells us specific things we need to know about Him.

If we plan to stay connected to the vine and derive our life and power from it, we need to understand that God removes fruitless branches. God also prunes fruitful branches. God cuts away the lifeless, and He cultivates the living. God destroys, then shifts focus to fruitful things.

While this might seem harsh when applied to humans, we understand and endorse this principle in other areas of our lives. For example, we want animal breeders to breed healthy

animals—no one dreams of buying a puppy with health issues. No one wants to eat beef from a diseased cow. No one wants to eat fresh sweet corn filled with insects. We understand and support this until it comes to our own lives. Then we are not quite so eager to say, “Yes, God, remove the parts of my life that are not pleasing to you, cut away the parts of me that are bad!”

The purpose of these words is to help people understand how God approaches us. <sup>1</sup> *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.”* God the Father cuts off every branch, which represents followers of Jesus, who **bear no fruit**. When you cut a branch off a vine, what happens? **It dies.**

Jesus stresses fruitlessness again in verse six: <sup>6</sup> *“If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”* God cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit, and then the workers gather and burn the withered branches. Whether we like it or not, the first work of the gardener (the Father) is judgment, some of it now and some at the end of the age. This Scripture raises the question: Can a branch, meaning a disciple of Jesus, have eternal life but then lose it and be condemned?

Perhaps you grew up believing in eternal salvation, that once you are saved, you are always saved. On the contrary, maybe you are more Arminian and think people can lose their salvation. Do verses like these mean that a union with Jesus is not permanent? Can we be “in Christ” but then “leave Christ” forever?

To understand this, we need to address who this branch is that is *“in me”* that doesn’t bear fruit (John 15:2). The key is to realize that in the Gospel of John there were followers who claimed to be believers who were not true believers (John 2:23). There were disciples who were not true disciples (John 6:66). The devil filled one of the chosen 12 (John 6:70); Jesus knew it from the beginning when He chose him (John 6:64).

In the same way, some branches are not true branches. They claim to be “in Jesus,” but they are not. The inauthentic belief is evident earlier in John 8: *<sup>30</sup> Even as he spoke, many believed in him. <sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”*

Notice the words you read. It started with people who “believed in him.” Six verses later, Jesus told the same so-called believers that their “belief” only provided an attachment to Him, not a devotion to Him. They were preparing to kill Jesus because they did not want to apply His teachings into their lives. *<sup>37</sup> “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word.”*

The same thing was true of the word “disciple.” In John 6:66, it says, *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* They had referred to themselves as disciples and believers, and yet they chose to walk away. There are disciples, and there are “true disciples.” There are believers, and there are “true believers.” There are branches and “true branches.

The bottom line from Jesus is that *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples”* (John 8:31). The key word is “if.” If means it is a choice. You can choose to hold to and actually live out Jesus’s teachings or not. If you do, Jesus is saying you are a true disciple. If you do not live out the teachings of Jesus, you are *not* a true disciple of Jesus.

Judas is the clearest example of a branch that was attached to Jesus for years, in a close relationship with Him, but not a true believer. Jesus said as much in John 6: *<sup>64</sup> “Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. <sup>65</sup> He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”*

This Scripture brings us back to the question—Can a branch, meaning a disciple of Jesus, have eternal life but then lose it and be

condemned? The parable indicates that the broken-off branches are the so-called believers, as in John 2:23 and 8:30, and the so-called disciples identified in John 6:66, and Judas Iscariot in John 6:65. They tie themselves to the vine, but never truly graft themselves into it. The explicit link between these false disciples is shared in John 15:8, *“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”* Believing in who Jesus is or connecting yourself to Him does not make you a true disciple; it’s when you bear His fruit that it **proves** you are His disciple.

In John 15, Jesus doesn’t simply say, <sup>5</sup> *“I am the vine; you are the branches.”* He included the gardener in the metaphor because He wanted us to know the two great things that God the Father does in tending the vine and the branches. One is that God cuts off fruitless branches, and the other is that God prunes fruitful branches. He cuts away the lifeless, and He cultivates the living. He destroys, and He redirects. Jesus was preparing His disciples for what was to come.

Soon, the disciples would experience betrayal within their own group, something that only Jesus had foreseen. They would experience persecution from the outside as well, with no idea just how severe it would be. Judas, a disciple, would soon walk away and choose to be eternally separated (broken off from Jesus) and, in due time, be destroyed. But God, the gardener, had it all under control. God knew what was coming and He was preparing everyone for it.

After sharing that the gardener removes branches that do not bear fruit, Jesus talks about pruning fruitful branches. Why prune the fruitful branches? Let us consider what this pruning might be for. Cultivating health? Redirecting growth? You can read Jesus’s answer to this question in John 15:2: *“while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”*

Pruning means cutting, trimming, or removing **a part** of

the whole. Pruning also involves tying up parts of the plant to encourage it to grow in a different direction, changing what it naturally wants to do. It's a sobering picture when we realize Jesus wasn't talking about plants; He was talking about you and me. Sometimes God needs to change the direction of our growth. Sometimes God needs to change the friends we have because they are pulling us in the wrong direction. Sometimes God needs to remove us from our jobs even if we can't see that in the moment.

The best explanation of this work is found in Hebrews 12: *<sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.* This concept continues in verse 11: *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* <sup>12</sup> *Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.* <sup>13</sup> *"Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*

In the context of Hebrews 12, this discipline is happening through persecution. Jesus talked about this in John 15:20 when He said, *"A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."* Persecution is not the only way the Father prunes the true branches, but it is one way.

What Jesus wants us in unity with Him, but not at the expense of our external life experiences. These experiences influence us, and Jesus wants us to know that His Father governs them. Persecution, hardship, calamity: such things do not come to us all willy-nilly. They are not aimless or random. They are the gardener's work. Everything has a plan and a purpose: to help us produce more fruit.

Look at verse two once more, <sup>2</sup> *"while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."* God is not the sap or the vine; that is Jesus. The Father's work is pruning, cutting, and caring for us, which helps us take what the vine gives us and produce the fruit Jesus has for us!

The point of verses two and six is that Jesus is preparing His disciples for defection from within and persecution from without. He is encouraging them and us that His Father is in control of both. No betrayer will escape! All your hardships will draw you deeper into God. The key is to remain in Jesus no matter what life throws at you, as He said in verse five: <sup>5</sup> *“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

What does remaining in Jesus mean? It means that **God is your source for everything**. You should not look to your job for security or happiness, nor should you look to your retirement or 401(k) for future joy. Your joy does not come from a relationship or money. Your mood is not dependent on your coworkers or boss. **Your source is God and God alone.**

God and God alone can fill your spiritual tank. When He does, Jesus will fill you so much that others will see Him in you through your words and actions. Then you will be bearing the kind of fruit Jesus was talking about in these passages. You will be so close to Jesus that He will call you His friend. You will naturally love people the way Jesus loves people. Which is why Jesus said: <sup>9</sup> *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”* Verse 13 contains the essential piece: <sup>13</sup> *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”* We can sum all of this up in one phrase: **we need to love each other as Jesus loves us.**

Love each other. Don’t judge, gossip, or point out others’ mistakes or shortcomings. Curb the desire to get preachy with non-Christians; instead, love them as Jesus did.

We need to remember that the Spirit of God lives inside of His believers, including us! The promise in this passage is that if you live the life God has designed you for, God will be with you always! You will have everything you need to do the work that



## CHAPTER 75

# THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



John 15:18–16:15

Growing up, I do not remember hearing that it was my job as a believer to tell other people about Jesus. I went to a Christian college and do not remember taking any classes teaching me that all believers should tell other people about Jesus. As an adult, I attended many different churches across the country and do not recall them telling me that either. When I attended seminary, only two classes I took focused on leading people to Jesus. Yet in today's reading, Jesus makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit would empower His followers to do exactly that. It makes me wonder why the modern church has strayed away from Jesus' directive.

But, before we dive into the Scripture reading, let's start with two more famous last words:

Michael Landon, a starring actor in *Bonanza* and *Little House on the Prairie*: “You're right, it's time. I love you all.”

Kurt Cobain, the lead singer of the American rock band Nirvana: “It is better to burn out than fade away.”



John 15:18-25

Jesus knew this was His final central teaching to His core disciples, and He knew that very soon the end of His life was approaching. Jesus wanted the disciples to be aware of what was about to happen. Perhaps forewarned by this knowledge, they would remember and have the courage to face it rather than run in fear.

Let me paraphrase what Jesus just said: Jesus told his followers that people would be mean to them for speaking about Him. Jesus told his followers that people would try to harm them

for teaching people to live like Him. He said not to be surprised when the world spoke about them with vile intent.

Here we are 2,000+ years later, and if we are honest, many Christians are surprised by the media's negative spin regarding Christians. We should never be surprised by the many people who hate us and spread untrue things about us. Consider what happened during COVID-19—people were shocked that governors would ban churches from meeting, that police would fine people for going to a drive-in church, and that pastors went to jail for still holding in-person church. Why were we surprised? Jesus told us what would happen.

We cannot expect people who do not know Jesus to behave like people who do. If we elect people to leadership who do not believe in Jesus, how can we expect them to act in Christ-like ways? If we elect people who openly oppose godly principles, why are we shocked when they stand against the church? My questions are not a political statement for either side of the aisle; it is simply common sense. Jesus was making a valid point: **Do not expect the lost to behave in Christ-like ways.**

You cannot expect a non-Christian to respond like a Christian; they do not have the same standards. You cannot project your standards on someone who does not know Jesus. When you do, they will see you as the intolerant one and view you in an even less favorable light. If you recognize that you are living to a higher standard, don't judge someone who doesn't know your standard; try loving them instead. Then they might realize how different your life is and recognize that you love them even though they have a different lifestyle.

Over a lifetime of you trying to live like Jesus, they will take note and hopefully come to know Him. Verse 21 explains this clearly: <sup>21</sup> *“They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”* They do not know God, and that is why they do what they do. Christians, if you are truly followers

of Jesus, then be like Jesus and be ready for the challenge. Expect it and prepare for it so that when it happens, you can respond to it as Jesus did.

I have been asked, “Well, that is a great theory, but how do we do it? How do we prepare for someone to bash me for my faith?” Those are great questions, and Jesus knew you would want the answer. Starting in verse 26, Jesus said, <sup>26</sup> *“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”*

Pause for a moment and note that you must also testify about Jesus and God. Understand that your life is **not** about coming to know Jesus and then never diving deeper. Your life should be about **sharing** the good news of Jesus. The point of your salvation is not to warm up a seat at church once a week, throw a \$20 bill in the offering plate, and call it good. So, let me ask you three questions.

Who are you investing in that does not know Jesus?

Who are you inviting to church who isn't a “church person”?

Who are you modeling Jesus to, in the hope that he or she will come to know Him?

If your mind is blank right now, that is not good. Jesus said He expects us to testify about Him.

The great news is that Jesus explains how we can do this in John 16:1-15: <sup>1</sup> *“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.”* The *“all this”* are the passages we have studied in prior chapters. The entire goal of *The Real Jesus* series is to help you learn how to testify to the truth regarding Jesus. He told you all of that so you would never fall away and that you would have the tools to reach others. By reading the four books in this series, you will be able to say, “Wow! Jesus was right, and He prepared me for this! I am ready!”

Jesus continues to expand on what might happen to His

followers and us in John 16:2: <sup>2</sup> *“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.”*

It might cost you your entire life to be a true disciple of Jesus. If you do not support a social agenda that goes against the teachings of Jesus, you might lose your job or your company. If you do not support a social agenda that goes against the teachings of the Bible, a group of people may socially and financially destroy you. Unless you live under a rock, you have seen this happen in our country.

Around the world, we have seen people commit unspeakably horrible acts who believe they are doing a great service for their country. People who think they are right to beat or kill other people in the name of their cause. People call for the destruction of businesses that do not bow to their social agendas. People are destroying whoever or whatever they want in the name of “saving lives.” However, they do not recognize the irony in their own beliefs.

In John 16, God warned us this would happen:

<sup>3</sup> *“They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. <sup>4</sup> I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, <sup>5</sup> but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup> Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. <sup>7</sup> But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because people do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

*<sup>12</sup>“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup>But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. <sup>15</sup>All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”*

Jesus told us this to prepare us and to let us know that when it happens, we should not worry because God has everything under control. We also see the work of the Holy Spirit and how He will help us. The Holy Spirit prepares us to stand up to a world that hates us, to stand tall when attacked, and to be ready to fight the good fight to the very end. The key is this: **The only way to live like Jesus to the end is to remain connected to God through the Holy Spirit.**

We must stay close to God and remain focused on Jesus, keeping ourselves pure so that the Holy Spirit can live in us and through us. I suggest rereading John 15, and underlining all the “remain in” phrases you see. The truth is: **The only way to withstand the evil attacks of the world is by the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us.**

Jesus sent us His Spirit to live inside of us. Jesus knew there was no way we could do this on our own. We would need help because Jesus could not be here physically for all of us, but through His death, He sent His Spirit to live inside each of us for specific reasons:

- To **prove** the world wrong, regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment. (vs. 8-11)
- To **guide** you into all the truth. (v. 13)
- To **tell** you what is yet to come. (v. 13)
- To **glorify** Jesus and make things known to you. (v. 14)

The help of the Holy Spirit is not exclusive to a few people but is for **all** followers of Jesus. We never need to worry about what

the world throws at us because **when the Holy Spirit of God is in us, He will lead us, guide us in truth, and make things previously unknown to us known.**

The key is to give your life to Jesus fully—that means heart, mind, will, and spirit. Then, as the Holy Spirit fills you, learn from Him. Listen to Him. Follow Him. The Holy Spirit is our guide! We must cherish the living presence of God inside us.

Today, begin doing the things Jesus called you to do. Celebrate and utilize the power of the Spirit of God living inside you. Realize the promise in this passage as you live into the life God has designed for you and know that God will be with you always. You will have everything you need to do Kingdom work just like Jesus did. Live your life for Him so when you look back, you will be proud of how God moved in and blessed your life.



#### LIFE APPLICATION

- Think of someone you would like to help connect with the life-saving grace of Jesus and pray for the Holy Spirit to bring God glory by working through you.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## CHAPTER 76

# JOY THROUGH DIFFICULTY



John 16:16-33

As I work on this chapter, I am sitting in a Starbucks with my daughter, Addie, looking out over Lake Huron at Mackinac Island. Our family camps up here annually with all of my wife's side of the family, and we have many great memories from this place. However, it is not like it was years ago. The kids are growing up, and they do not play like they used to. Many of the kids are older now and don't even come. How do we find joy when things in life change? How do we find joy when we long for the past, when life was easier or simpler? How do we find joy when life is more difficult or complex? In today's reading, we will see Jesus' closest friends asking the same thing.

The famous last words over the last few chapters have been interesting. Each quote speaks to the heart of each person and their focus as they get to the end of their lives.

The Ultimate Warrior, an American professional wrestler, said to his fans the day before he died, "The spirit of the Ultimate Warrior will run forever!"

Aaron Burr, the 3<sup>rd</sup> vice president of the United States, was asked by a strong Christian friend if he believed in God and wanted to know Jesus before he died. Aaron replied, "On that subject, I am coy."



John 16:16-20

Jesus told the disciples that the end was coming soon. He wanted them to know that He would be taken away and they would not be able to go where He was going. Jesus also said He would come back to them. I am sure this was quite confusing to His followers

because they must have thought that Jesus' movement was just starting. How could Jesus talk about leaving now and returning later? Jesus then told them their grief would turn to joy.

Have you ever been in a place in life where you had no idea how you were going to get through a situation and come out on the other end alive, let alone joyful? We all need to hold on to this truth from Jesus. He knew pain, hardships, and tough times would come to each of us. However, with Jesus on our side, we will make it through. If you seek Jesus in those difficult seasons, not only will you survive, but you will also discover you can find joy in that season. That was what Jesus said to His followers and what we need to hear too. **No matter what this world throws at us, if you follow Jesus, you will find joy.**

You will go through hard things in life, things that you wish never happened. People will say things about you that hurt. I promise you, if you keep the faith in those seasons and keep seeking Jesus, you will come through it. You may even find joy at some point. I know this to be true because Jesus said we will find joy if we seek Him.

I have a personal story that also proves this is true. When I was ready to go into ministry, God did not open that door. It caused me a lot of pain and a lot of frustration, but even worse, it caused me to wonder if I was following God's will at all. I kept seeking God along with my wife, Jenny. After a long time, God brought us to the place where He needed us to be. Even though circumstances hadn't changed, we had, and it was then that great joy and excitement entered our lives! If we had given up because life got hard, we would have missed all the joy that came later. If we had given up on God's timing, which was not our timing, I would likely never have become a pastor. I most likely wouldn't have written the series on the life of Jesus, which led you to read these lessons from His life. My point is: **Don't give up—trust in God's timing!**



## John 16:21-33

Just as in the previous chapter, Jesus again told the disciples about the hardships yet to come. He did this hoping that when those hard times came, they would be able to look back and remember what He said. They knew that Jesus would bring them through whatever trials came their way. Which is why Jesus said: <sup>33</sup> *“take heart! I have overcome the world.”* Which means don’t worry. You will make it through, and I (Jesus) will be with you through it all,

Knowing what was ahead, Jesus prepared them for hard days, persecution, being scattered, hated, and ostracized. He also told them not to worry about any of those things because soon He would show them why they would never need to worry again! Soon, when He was resurrected, they would understand that He was fully God, having overcome sorrow and death.

The Bible’s theme is clear: do not worry. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 6: <sup>25</sup> *“Therefore I tell you, do not be worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”*

If Jesus takes such great care of the animals, He will surely take care of you. God’s Word is clear; believers are not to be held captive by worry or anxiety. We shouldn’t focus on the plans, needs, and uncertainties of tomorrow. Our focus should be on what Jesus said to His followers in Matthew 6: <sup>33</sup> *“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

If you are exhausted from worry and anxious thoughts, take comfort in what Jesus said in Matthew 11: <sup>28</sup> *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my*

*yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* If, because it is a choice you can make—if you choose to go to Jesus, He will help you through whatever is going on in your life!

Here are more Scriptures that provide spiritual assurances:

John 14: <sup>27</sup> *“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.”*

Proverbs 12: <sup>25</sup> *Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.*

1 Peter 5: <sup>7</sup> *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Philippians 4: <sup>6</sup> *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

How can we defeat anxiety and replace it with joy? Take it all to God in prayer. Start with praising and thanking God for the good things you do have. Then let Him know what is causing your anxious thoughts. As God aligns your heart with His, He will guard your heart and mind and bring you to a place of joy.

Take a few minutes and consider these two verses in Hebrews 12: <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Building on this encouragement, we must do our best to remove the things in our lives that cause us to sin. These sins cause great amounts of anxiety and worry. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Fixed on the eternal prize and eternal salvation,

so that we do not get distracted by the world we live in. We need to endure trials just like Jesus did. I can promise you that eternal salvation is worth more than any temporary pleasure this world has to offer.

Do not miss the key point in Hebrews 12: *<sup>2</sup> For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The **joy** of the cross? How would dying by crucifixion, a horrible death intended to bring maximum pain and suffering, bring joy? How could being shamed bring joy? How can any of that bring joy?

It brought joy to Jesus because He was not focused on the temporary, horrific situation, but on the eternal reward this brought to mankind. He had joy in knowing that soon He would be sitting at the right hand of God the Father. We need to remember this: **God promises us that if we keep our eyes fixed on Him alone, it will lead to an eternal perspective on life which brings us joy.**

Jesus found His joy not in what happened to Him on earth, but in what He knew would come because of the life He lived. Regardless of what life throws at you, you can also find joy by having faith in Jesus and knowing what Jesus did. Then you will be filled with JOY for all of eternity. When you look back on your life, live in a way you will be proud of how God moved in it.



#### LIFE APPLICATION

- Our life is a marathon that one day will end. Ask yourself: How am I doing in this race? Pray and ask God to help you remain focused on knowing you will spend eternity with your Creator. It is your destiny.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself,



## CHAPTER 77

# WHAT WAS THE WORK OF JESUS?



### John 17

This is the final chapter detailing Jesus' last words to His disciples, because it is after this passage that Jesus was arrested. As you read this, note that the last thing Jesus did with his core followers was pray with them. Never forget the power of prayer. We are starting this chapter the same way, but for the last time, with some famous last words.

Elvis Presley, an American singer and actor whose musical talents shaped rock and roll, supposedly said, "I'm going to the bathroom to read."

Joe DiMaggio, a professional baseball player with the New York Yankees, said, "I'll finally get to see Marilyn Monroe."



### John 17

What an incredible and revealing prayer. Jesus prayed for Himself, for His disciples, and for all of us today. Isn't that amazing to read that Jesus specifically prayed for you in His final prayer? I sure think it is.

This chapter will cover only the highlights of John 17. Please understand there is so much more to glean from this passage than this one chapter. The first section may cause some conflict in the minds of long-term followers of Jesus, so I want you to answer this question before we move on: **What was the work Jesus came to do?**

As you reflect on that question, I'd like to share my perspective as a pastor. I believe my calling is to reach as many people as I can for Jesus and to train them up to do the same wherever they live, work, and play. What was Jesus' work? Ponder that before you

continue reading in John 17.

<sup>1</sup> *“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. <sup>2</sup>For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.”* There we see a very *clear* purpose for Jesus’ life: to give eternal life. Maybe you wrote that down as your answer to the question about what Jesus’ work was.

However, is that the correct answer to the question I posed? <sup>3</sup>*“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”*

A common answer is that Jesus’ work was to die on the cross so we can be forgiven of our sins. However, Jesus hadn’t died or risen from the dead at this point. So, what was this **work** that God gave Jesus to do that brought God the Father glory, and that Jesus said was finished? We as Christians place great emphasis on the cross and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit to us, but at this point, none of that had happened.

If you have a study Bible, it likely says something like this in the notes, “work: perhaps only what Jesus has done up to this point, but more likely everything Jesus will do, including his death, resurrection, and exaltation.” Scholars have two views on this, just like that explanation does. I land with the first group, keeping in mind that work and purpose are two different things. Work is what you do to accomplish a purpose. I believe Jesus clearly says in verse two that His “purpose” was to bring people eternal life, and this was accomplished through His “work.” The finished “work” is addressed directly in verse four.

Let me take you on a brief journey to illustrate what I am saying. Jesus said, “I have finished the work that you gave me to do.” Think back to book one of *The Real Jesus* series. What were the first recorded words Jesus ever spoke? Jesus was just 12 years old when He was found at the temple because His parents had left

Him in Jerusalem. They found Jesus at the temple, sitting with the teachers of the law, listening to them and asking them questions. His parents scolded Him, to which Jesus responded in Luke 2, <sup>49</sup> *“Didn’t you know that I had to be in my Father’s house?”* Other translations use the word “work” or “business.” But what was this “work or business” that 12-year-old Jesus was doing? Obviously, in that moment, it was not dying for our sins.

Throughout Jesus’ life, He said that He did not come to do His own will but the will of the one who sent Him. In previous chapters, we saw Jesus go to the Samaritans with His disciples. The disciples went into the village to buy some food, and a woman came to draw water from the well. Later in the story, when the people had finally left, His disciples offered Him some of the food. He answered in John 4, <sup>34</sup> *“My food”, said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”* There it is again, at that moment, He was doing God’s will and work. What was it?

Fast forward to when the Jews sought to kill Jesus for healing on the Sabbath day, as recorded in John 5. When confronted, Jesus replied, <sup>17</sup> *“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”*

In John 5, Jesus explained that John the Baptist came as a witness for Him. Then Jesus declared that He was doing the **works** the Father had given Him to finish. Continuing with this theme in John 9, Jesus emphasized, <sup>4</sup> *“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”* Clearly, there are countless examples of Jesus speaking about His work on earth.

The main question is: Was His **work** to make disciples of Himself, who would go on to make disciples to reach the entire world? Did His disciples finally understand what Jesus said in John 17, and were they ready to take up the work? Jesus’ earthly **work** was complete. Now, Jesus could move on to fulfilling His ultimate purpose.

This explanation makes sense when you consider that this statement gave rise to Jesus' prayer for His 12 disciples and His prayer for future disciples like you and me. It makes sense that Jesus would pray for those who would continue His **work** because we cannot continue His work of salvation. Obviously, we are incapable of providing that. However, if His **work** is making disciples of Him who can make more disciples of Him, then it makes total sense because we can all do that.

If the entire point of our salvation is only reconciliation to God and forgiveness of our past sins, why do people not instantly go to heaven when they are saved? There must be another point. There must be **work** for building the Kingdom that we must do, and I think that is why we are still here.

Consider Jesus' final words written in Matthew 28, known as the Great Commission: *<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Go...Make Disciples... Baptize...Teach...Don't miss the critical work here we all participate in. **We are here so that we can make disciples who can make more disciples of Jesus.**

Read John 17 again with this new revelation of your new role as a believer.

Here is the point: **Followers of Jesus are to continue the work of Jesus until He takes them home.** Our work is to make disciples of Jesus, baptize the disciples we make, and then teach them to obey everything we have learned about Jesus from the Bible.

Do you now see why I created this book series? This was created to help you get involved in the work of Jesus. I hope by now, if you aren't already, you are walking through these books





## CHAPTER 78

# THE GREAT BETRAYAL: JUDAS



John 18:1-14, Luke 22:39-44

If you are an avid football fan, imagine for a moment that you are a Michigan fan and, by some horrible stroke of misfortune, you end up married to an Ohio State fan. Imagine attending a family event wearing a Buckeye's jersey as a show of support for your spouse. What is your family going to call you? "Traitor!" "Turncoat!" "Out of the will!"

No one likes a traitor. Whether it's someone whose loyalties are divided between two teams or infidelity in a relationship. No one likes someone who rats them out or betrays their cause. The following is the story of the person who betrayed Jesus, the Son of God.



John 18:1-3

Judas was one of the core disciples, one of Jesus' inner circle of 12. Judas would have witnessed many of Jesus' miracles. He was there to help Jesus feed the five thousand. Jesus sent him out into ministry, and he served alongside the other disciples like a brother. Here is a question for you to answer: **Do you think Judas started out fully devoted to Jesus but became less interested over time?**

In the next chapter, we will read about Peter's denial of Jesus, which happened in a vulnerable moment. However, Judas's betrayal was premeditated and plotted over an extended period, maybe a year. We began to see some of Judas's struggles in John 12:3-5, when a woman came with an alabaster jar and anointed Jesus at Bethany. Judas condemned the woman for wasting

expensive perfume, indicating that the money could have been used to feed the poor.

Judas sounded noble, reasonable even. Some of us may have agreed with Judas. I think of how many people in church say things like, “Why did we spend that money on visitors, coffee for people, or new chairs instead of investing it in missions?” It sounds noble and rational, but sometimes we miss the point. Just like Judas missed the point of what this woman was doing for Jesus.

Judas was the treasurer and embezzled from the gifts given to Jesus’s ministry (John 12:6). Eventually, Judas approached the religious leaders, offering to betray Jesus for the price of thirty pieces of silver, equivalent to a half-year’s wage today. (Matthew 26:14-16).

We can speculate about Judas’s motives for his betrayal, but for a good Jewish disciple to turn in a teacher who claimed to be God would have been a commendable act in that day and age. Perhaps the religious leaders exploited his theological convictions. Possibly, Judas believed this was simply doing what any good Jewish man should do.

The problem arose when Judas betrayed Jesus for money, revealing a heart altogether different than that of a true and faithful disciple. Judas was greedy, and he likely harbored a grudge against Jesus. Was Judas fearful or angry that his Messiah wasn’t properly following Jewish traditions like the Pharisees and Sadducees? Was Judas upset that Jesus wasn’t becoming the ruler he thought He would? Or maybe Judas was angry that he could not control Jesus or motivate Him to be the Jesus he wanted Him to be. The truth is, we don’t know why Judas betrayed Jesus, but his betrayal shows that even the closest followers of anyone can turn away over time.

I, like so many pastors and leaders, have experienced this. One of the most heart-wrenching betrayals I ever experienced came at

a church-wide meeting where people got up and lied and said all kinds of extremely hurtful things about my wife and me. It was one thing to sit and endure those words. It was worse watching the elders sit and do nothing. Those closest to us, who knew the truth, chose to do nothing because staying quiet was easier than correcting people publicly. Leadership is hard. Following Jesus is hard. However, if we are prepared, we can overcome anything.



### John 18:4-14

In this Scripture, we observe the odd behavior of those who came to arrest Jesus. We don't know why they drew back and fell to the ground. Perhaps for a moment, they realized that the term Jesus used, "I am," is another name for God, one He often called Himself in the Old Testament. Some strange awe and terror filled them, which they could give no account of, but it was troubling for them. In the uncertain light of the moon and smoking torches, perhaps they failed to recognize Him until He spoke. Maybe it was for fear of laying hands on a holy man, a prophet.

To all who were there, Jesus' calmness and dignity would have been a shocking contrast to what they expected. Starting in verse 7, something even more incredible happened: *<sup>7</sup> Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." <sup>9</sup> This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."*

Jesus was patiently standing there, amid an awe-struck crowd. He encouraged them to do the work for which they had come. Jesus stepped between His disciples and danger, some of whom would not do the same for Him, and said, *<sup>8</sup> "If you are looking for me, then let these men go."* There is a wonderful truth here: **Jesus protects His followers.**

When that terrified mob recoiled from Jesus, why did He stand there so patiently? He could have run or passed through the middle of them with ease and gone on His way as He had before. He told them who He was. There was no need for the traitor's kiss, which we read about in the other stories.

We should probably ask the question, why? Why did Jesus stay instead of saving Himself? We can find the answer in Luke 22:



### Luke 22:39-44

In that moment, Jesus understood what was coming, and as many of us would, He talked to His Dad about it. He even asked if perhaps there was another way. In that moment, perhaps He was unsure if He could endure it. I am sure I would have doubts about my ability to endure something like that. Perhaps you have been in that place before and wanted to quit your job, leave your marriage, or change schools. Think about how you respond when everything inside you says, “Run!” Jesus asked God the Father for help and was honest about how He felt, but He didn't stop there. He went on to say in Luke 22: <sup>42</sup> *“yet not my will, but yours be done.”*

Jesus knew life was not about His personal desires, pleasures, or always being happy. He knew there was a greater purpose in life. Instead of running in fear, He trusted His Father's plan. Instead of doing what He wanted, He waited on God's timing. Is that how you respond?

**Are you there in your relationship with God, where you would rather have God's will happen in your life than your will?**

**Are you there yet in trusting God's timing as better than your timing?**

Luke 22 continues: <sup>43</sup> *An angel from heaven appeared to him and*

*strengthened him. <sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. <sup>45</sup> When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup> “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”*

How was Jesus so calm in the face of what was coming? **Jesus was aligned with God the Father.**

How can you respond the right way in life?

How can you be calm in the face of any hardship? **Align your life with God.**

If you don't align yourself with God, you may find yourself doing what Peter did in Luke 22:45 by valuing sleep over time with God.

Or maybe you fancy yourself a warrior like Peter, as written in John 18: <sup>10</sup> *Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) <sup>11</sup> Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” <sup>12</sup> Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him <sup>13</sup> and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. <sup>14</sup> Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.*

Peter drew his sword, ready to defend and protect Jesus, but Jesus told him to put it down because his actions didn't align with God's plan.

In Luke 22:51, you will read that after Peter cut off the servant's ear, Jesus healed the man in front of everyone. Jesus performed a miracle in their presence. Then He held out his arms, allowing them to bind Him and arrest Him. It was not their power but His free will that allowed this to happen.

The entire story of the Gospels is constructed on the principle that Jesus' life and death were a voluntary surrender of Himself

for the sake of man's sin. No one person or thing made Jesus do it. Nothing fastened Him on the cross besides His free will. He came into the world by His own choice. He took upon Himself the form of a servant by His own choice; for the sake of all people, He willingly humbled Himself. Step by step, He voluntarily journeyed towards His arrest. From the beginning of Jesus' life, this was His destiny, made necessary by His love for us.

As we approach the end of Jesus' earthly life, we see more distinctly that He willingly went to the cross. His last journey to Jerusalem with His disciples was the triumphal entry, when everyone praised Jesus and hailed Him as King. Then Jesus went into the temple and severely rebuked the priests and rulers. He then retreated from the city so that He would not die before the Passover. In both the hastening toward the city and in the retreating from it, there is apparently the same purpose. He would lay down His life, and He would determine the trajectory of the how, when, and where.

Let me end this chapter where we started. Judas was one of the core disciples. He was one of Jesus' inner circle of 12. Judas would have seen the miracles of Jesus that we have read about in Scripture and referenced in this series. Judas walked and served with Jesus for a long time. But Judas betrayed Jesus, and in Matthew 27:5 it is recorded that Judas was so overcome with guilt that he took his own life.

Remember that question I asked: **Do you think Judas started out fully devoted to Jesus but became less interested over time?**

Here is an even tougher question and far more personal: **Have you "kind of" wandered away from Jesus as well?** You must ask yourself if you have grown cold to Jesus over the years.

Have you allowed your doubts or frustrations with God, your pursuit of riches, or a career to cloud your judgment?

Has your life pronounced that you are beginning to deny the

reality of who Jesus is?

Have you started to allow culture to define God?

Have you allowed culture to define your right and wrong?

Have you strayed from the truth of the Bible over time?

It is so easy to think we are doing the right thing, yet not realize we ourselves are betrayers.

In the movie *Braveheart*, there is a scene of betrayal that I will never forget. *Braveheart* tells the theatrical story of the historical battle between the British and the Scottish warrior William Wallace, who joined forces with the head Scottish Lord Robert the Bruce. During the battle, William Wallace discovers that Robert the Bruce deceived him and joined forces with the British. Wallace narrowly escaped the battle. The scene between Robert the Bruce and his father following the battle showed the guilt and frustration Robert felt for having betrayed Wallace. It is a scene that shows a small glimpse into the complex nature of betrayal. The bottom line is this: Please don't get to the end of your life and look back and realize you betrayed Jesus.



#### LIFE APPLICATION

- Give an honest look at your level of devotion to God. Are you past your peak? Are you less interested in God now than you were in the past? Are you less devoted today than you were? Are you confident that if today were your last day, you could look back with joy at what God did through your life?
  - In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
  - As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...
-



## CHAPTER 79

# THE GREAT BETRAYAL: PETER



John 18:1-40, Luke 22:39-44

Jesus knew what it was like to be betrayed. In His hometown, they wanted to stone Him. Many, whom He hoped had turned their hearts to Him, actually let Him down. He was thrown under the bus numerous times, even by His half-brothers. Jesus understood what it was to be abandoned and what it felt like to be completely alone. Have you ever been betrayed, hurt, or abandoned? If you're in that spot now or have been in the past, Jesus understands. He will never leave you if you seek Him.

Peter, one of Jesus's closest friends and most notable disciples, failed Him in this story. Peter told Jesus in Matthew 26: <sup>33</sup> *“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”* Despite Peter's intentions, Jesus told Peter he would deny knowing Him. Peter tried to stand firm in his beliefs and would never have imagined denying Jesus, yet he did so in the very story you are about to read. You may relate to this story if you have ever denied knowing someone or someone denied knowing you.



John 18:1-18

This was the first time Peter denied Jesus. It seems shocking that Peter did this. He had gone through so much with Jesus and had been with Him since the beginning. He had seen Jesus do countless miracles. Jesus had even empowered Peter to do miracles himself. If Peter really believed Jesus was the Son of God, why would he do this? This is where it is helpful to put ourselves in Peter's sandals.

Imagine being Peter, who thought Jesus was the Messiah. He sees Jesus being arrested and telling him not to fight back. The Messiah was supposed to be strong. The Messiah was supposed

to be the King they were waiting for. The One who would not be pushed around by the Romans ever again. Perhaps fear crept into Peter's heart because he didn't want to be arrested, too. So, he denied Jesus when confronted by a simple servant.



### John 18:19-27

The high priest questioned Jesus in verse 19 because he believed Jesus was teaching something secret to His disciples. Jesus said, "I am not. I teach openly. Go ask anyone. I practice what I preach." Clearly, they understood Jesus' underlying message, which was that they did not practice what they preached. This is why one of the officials slapped Him. No one likes being called out for being a hypocrite. After they struck Jesus, He reminded them of proper legal procedure, which they were not following. Then they sent Jesus off to another person to be questioned.

Shifting back to Peter, we see he denied Jesus twice more. The book of Luke provides more detail about this time. Starting in Luke 22, *<sup>60</sup> Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." <sup>62</sup> And he went outside and wept bitterly.*

Imagine the pain in Jesus' eyes. Peter's denial, even as Jesus stood beside him, powerfully reveals the effects of fear. Fear is a powerful emotion that can turn the most courageous and loyal individuals into cowards, leading them to abandon their mission.

This theme of betrayal reappears throughout time. The first instance was the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. People in colonial America were deeply concerned about the possibility of witches in their communities. There are many accounts of people turning in friends and family to remove the possible accusation of witchcraft

from their shoulders and onto someone else. These betrayals led to trials and executions of those supposed witches.

Moving to more recent times, we again see emotional fear driving people to betray those around them. When COVID-19 initially hit in 2020, nationwide crime plummeted, but then something interesting happened. People started calling the police left and right to report neighbors who weren't following the rules for stopping the spread of the virus. Neighbors started betraying their neighbors, local businesses, and even churches. Fear drove people to do things they would never have dreamed of doing.

Fear is a powerful weapon. The media thrives on it and draws people's attention to the loudest voice. When people are afraid, they may not think rationally. Peter's fear made him deny his Savior.



#### John 18:28-40

The irony in these passages is palatable. The reason the religious didn't enter Pilate's house was that it would prevent them from observing Passover. It would make them unable to celebrate God sparing the lives of countless Jewish people. At the same time, they were about to demand the death of God's Son. The leaders made sure to keep themselves clean so they could celebrate how God moved to save their ancestors. Continuing hypocrisy is something we should take note of and ensure we never allow it to creep into our lives. Pilate authorized the Jewish leaders to judge Jesus according to their own law and to carry out the sentence. However, the Jewish leaders replied that they were not allowed by the Romans to carry out a sentence of death, and that was the sentence they were hoping for.

It's interesting that Pilate, a neutral party, found no reason to condemn Jesus. Luke 23 says King Herod also questioned

Jesus and found no basis for a death sentence. Two prominent Roman leaders thought this was a sham. Pilate said, <sup>39</sup> *“But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’”* <sup>40</sup> *They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.*

The religious leaders hated Jesus enough to demand that Pilate release a murderer instead. Their hatred made them willing to become murderers like Barabbas. Jesus received a death sentence for Barabbas, who would be freed to kill again—the hypocrisy deepened.

These leaders claimed murder was wrong, yet viewed killing Jesus as justified to save people from His teachings. This happened throughout history to many church leaders who were killed for their faith. Today, people still destroy those who differ from their worldview, hence “cancel culture.”

Imagine being Jesus: betrayed by a disciple for money, denied three times by one of His closest disciples, then judged and found innocent. As you are taken outside, the supposed “good” church people—those who claim to know right from wrong and embody forgiveness—stand with your pastor and church leaders. You realize they look at you with hatred for trying to teach them about God, demanding your death for doing what you believed was right. Can you imagine the pain?

Now imagine the heartbreak Jesus experienced. This is why Jesus is so amazing. He endured the most difficult trials in life without sinning. Another amazing part was that Jesus endured it all because He loved those people who betrayed and hated Him. Jesus endured it all so He could bring salvation to everyone who would choose to see beyond themselves and see the reality of who He was. Jesus endured that so that He could sympathize with us.

If you are reading this and you are in pain, if someone has betrayed you, or you are broken or confused about life, you can

find freedom in Jesus. Take whatever is hurting you and lay it at the feet of Jesus, and He will help you!

We know Jesus will be there for us because Jesus was still there for Peter. Remember, Peter did not simply fail to stand up for Jesus; he denied Jesus three times. After the third denial, Jesus looked at him, and it sank in. Peter knew he had failed, had been a worthless friend, had no backbone, and had done exactly what he said he would never do. Perhaps you have been there, feeling like a failure in life, school, or sports. Maybe you have been a terrible friend and hurt someone, or done something in your marriage you said you never would. Here is the good news: Peter's story doesn't end with his public denial of Jesus.

Fast-forward to a time after Jesus rose from the grave. In John 21, it says: <sup>15</sup> *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"*

*"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

<sup>16</sup> *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

*He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

<sup>17</sup> *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*

Notice that Jesus asked Peter the same question **three times**: "Peter, do you love me?" Jesus didn't condemn Peter for his denial or call him terrible. Instead, Jesus showed love and offered reconciliation. Jesus then empowered Peter to become the foundation of the church that still exists today.

For those who have let Jesus down, He still offers open arms to forgive and restore us to hope. If you think Jesus could never love you after what you've done, nothing can stop God from loving

you. If you cry out to Jesus today, He will gladly forgive and show you more love than you can imagine. That’s true for countless people in the Bible. **The question isn’t, “Will Jesus accept you?” It’s “Will you accept Jesus?”**



### LIFE APPLICATION

- Jesus never held a grudge. It did not matter how people hurt Jesus; He always forgave them when they asked. Are you holding on to a past hurt from someone? Examine your relationships and ensure you are not holding onto past hurts or unforgiveness that you need to release.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## CHAPTER 80

# THE GREAT BETRAYAL: THE JEWISH PEOPLE



John 19:1-24

Passion is a great thing, but misplaced passion can lead us astray. Many years ago, I preached through John chapter 21, which tells the miracle of when Jesus turned water into wine. In that message, I mentioned that Jesus and His closest followers drank wine. I talked about how Jesus was at a wedding party where they ran out of wine, and He performed a miracle by turning water into wine for the guests to drink.

When I preached, I shared that this miracle has always confused me because getting drunk is a sin. I am not sure why it was okay for Jesus to make more wine for the guests, some of whom were likely already drunk. I will never forget a passionate board member coming up to me right after I was done preaching to demand that I tell everyone the next week that drinking is a sin. I said, “No, because drinking is not a sin. Getting drunk is a sin. And we will not be a church that adds or deletes sins from the Bible.” That board member left the church shortly thereafter.

We are all entitled to hold personal convictions due to our past experiences or personal preferences. However, we are not allowed to impose our personal convictions on others. That is what the religious leaders did in Jesus’ time. In today’s passage, we continue to see Jesus not conform to others’ religious expectations.



John 19:1-24

This was hard to read. They beat Jesus and mocked Him, yet He

chose to endure it, all the while knowing He did not have to. Jesus could have stopped it, but His purpose was more important, so He chose to allow it to continue. This was not the first time Pilate said he found no basis for a charge. It was not the Romans who wanted to kill Jesus; it was the religious Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Jesus. These were the people who claimed to be looking for the Messiah, the Son of God. The people who should have known who Jesus was wanted to kill the Son of God. Don't ever miss that fact in the story of Jesus.

I will give you a modern translation of what you just read. The Supreme Court Chief Justice brought Jesus out and said, "I found no fault in this man. I do not see a reason for the death penalty. You should let Him go free." But the pastors, elders, deacons, and church members saw Jesus and screamed, "No, we want the death penalty!" That was the cry of the church people to the non-religious people. There is a bit of a problem with that.

The reason these people demanded the death of Jesus is explained in verse 7: *<sup>7</sup> The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."*

Jesus claimed to be God. Jesus claimed to be the person that the Jewish people had been waiting for since the foundation of time, and they did not accept Him. Jesus was standing in their midst. They had been dreaming of the day He would come, but they would not accept Him. All because Jesus did not operate the way they wanted Him to or teach the way they expected Him to. Yes, He did fulfill every prophecy, but He did not do what the leaders wanted Him to do. We know that 99% of the time, when someone is in power, they will cling to that power until death. The Jewish leaders did not want to lose control over the people. To maintain that dominance, Jesus needed to die.

I cannot tell you how often I hear people say, "It would be so much easier to believe in Jesus or trust in Jesus if I could see

and talk to Jesus.” The truth is it wouldn’t be any easier. If you look at the stories of His life, you see massive crowds following Jesus. Tons of people praised Jesus, until Jesus asked them to do something. Until Jesus told them something needed to change in their lives. Until Jesus called them out for their sins. Then the love for Jesus faded fast.

They loved to follow Jesus when it was all about the wonderful things Jesus was doing for them. Everyone loved the miracles, free food, the healing of the sick, and the raising of the dead, among other things. But it all changed for the followers when Jesus began asking them to do something uncomfortable or to change their opinions about how they should live or their way of thinking. Faced with the uncomfortable, **most** of them left.

In the same way, I know that some of you reading this are struggling to align your life with Jesus, rather than with culture. I know we want our hearts’ desires to guide us and hope that God accepts our ungodly decisions and actions. However, we have seen Jesus confront people for their sins. Jesus told them, and He tells us that life is not about following our hearts, but rather God’s heart. It is not about following our desires, but God’s desires. It is not about living any lifestyle we want, but God’s desire for a lifestyle that honors Him. At the end of His ministry, only a select few who truly believed remained faithful to Jesus.

It is no different today. Many people attend church each week but do not serve. They just sit back and consume good teachings but do nothing to apply them to their lives. Many love to talk the talk but do not live like someone transformed by an authentic relationship with Jesus. So, why do we think we would respond differently if we were in Jesus’ presence? All these good church-going people were standing there calling for the Messiah’s death, even though they had seen Him in the flesh.

We read that Pilate was afraid; perhaps it was because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. The emperor claimed to be a god,

and he did not take kindly to competition for that title. Or perhaps he was afraid because he noticed something in Jesus that seemed to be more than it appeared at first. And *if* He was God in flesh... killing God did not sound like a very good idea to him.

Afraid, *Pilate*<sup>9</sup> *went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.*<sup>10</sup> *"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"*

*<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."*

Jesus showed no fear. Jesus did not do what most anyone in this situation would do, plead for their life. Instead, He responded like someone with tremendous faith. This either scared or inspired Pilate because, *<sup>12</sup> Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."*

Clearly, Pilate saw that Jesus was more than just a regular man; he saw something more was going on here, but he still was not about to let this get back to Caesar. *<sup>13</sup> When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).*<sup>14</sup> *It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.*

*"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.*

*<sup>15</sup> But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"*

*"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.*

*"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.*

The chief priests shouted that they had but one king. These men were taught to look for the Messiah and spent their entire lives studying the Old Testament. They were trained from childhood to never bow down to anyone but the one true God, Yahweh, but they just declared God was not their King. Instead, they declared

a pagan to be a god and their king. That shows where their hearts truly were.

However, I am confident many of them did this specifically because of the **political** statement it made. Many did not look to Caesar as their king, but they knew that saying this would put Pilate in a difficult **political** position. In that day and age, if Pilate did not side with them, he would no longer be siding with his ruler. That was a death knell to Pilate's **political** career if this got back to Caesar. So, Pilate did what most politicians do: he gave in to save his career. *<sup>16</sup> Finally, Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.*

We can side with politics over God as well, so be careful not to be too judgmental. Sometimes we align with a political party that advocates for principles that God is directly opposed to. Sometimes we side with a political person who acts in a totally ungodly way. Be careful before you puff up your chest in political righteousness, because far too often, we stand with people whose actions directly oppose God.

Let me give you two specific examples from both ends of the political spectrum that illustrate how we can support things that the Bible might portray in a different light and how we may not realize it.

In Leviticus 19, it reads, *<sup>34</sup> The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.* It sounds like God wants us to love immigrants (foreigners) and to accept them as fellow citizens. This has been a hot political topic in America over the last few decades.

The second example leans the other way. Psalm 139:13-14 reads,

*<sup>13</sup> For you formed my inward parts;*

*you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*

*<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

It seems clear that God said life begins before birth. It shows that God created all the unborn babies, and therefore, no Christian should be pro-abortion.

Now let's jump back into John 19. *<sup>16</sup> So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). <sup>18</sup> There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.*

*<sup>19</sup> Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. <sup>21</sup> The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."*

*<sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."*

*<sup>23</sup> When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.*

*<sup>24</sup> "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."*

*This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,  
"They divided my clothes among them  
and cast lots for my garment."  
So this is what the soldiers did.*

The religious leaders got what they wanted. Jesus was taken, was crucified, and was going to die.

Don't miss the bigger picture despite the tragedy. Mary was found to be pregnant with Jesus before she was married, fulfilling a prophecy. Jesus was an immigrant to fulfill prophecy. Even His clothes were a part of this prophecy. Everything Jesus did in His life, and leading up to His death, fulfilled prophecies about Him. These prophecies had been passed down to the religious leaders

for generations. But now, when it all came true, they couldn't see it. Why? Because Jesus did not align with their political views or their religious views. Jesus would not conform to their expectations and do what they wanted Him to do. So, they continued pursuing Jesus until they finally saw to it that He was crucified.

We can look at these events and think about all the horrible people who did this to Jesus. The horrible people who beat, spat on, and placed a crown of thorns on our Savior's head, pushing it in so hard that blood ran down His Holy face. The awful guards who beat Him as He carried the cross and pounded nails through His hands and feet into that cross. We can think about the horrible things **other people** did to Jesus and forget something very important. **We did that to Jesus.**

We, you, me, all of us did that to Jesus. We sin, and the result of our sinning was why all of this happened to Jesus. We might as well have been there, driving the nails through His hands. Every time you **willingly** sin, that is what you are doing to Jesus. We are no better than those horrible people. Jesus, our Savior, was crucified by the religious people of His day.

I wonder how you and I would have reacted if we had been His followers at that time. If we had been there to see the end of the One whom we were following, how close would we have been to Jesus as He walked with the cross on that last day? How close would we have stood to the cross as He was crucified? Do you think you would be in the picture if it were broadcast on your favorite social media platform, Fox News, or CNN today? If you were there to witness Jesus' crucifixion, how near to the cross would you have been? That is something I doubt many of you have ever considered. Think about your commitment to Jesus. In His final moments, would your faith have put you near Him?



## CHAPTER 81

# JESUS ABANDONED



John 19:23-27

In the last chapter, I asked you to consider some challenging questions. Reflect again on your commitment to Jesus and whether, in His final hours, you would have stood by Him or hidden. This matters because what you will read in this passage identifies who **remained with** Him at the end.



John 19:23-27

*<sup>25</sup> Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

At the end of Jesus' life, only five people were present. Why them? Why did they stay when others fled?

It's not surprising Mary was there. Most mothers endure anything for their children. Even in suffering, Jesus looked out for His mother by entrusting her to His most beloved disciple. While that is a beautiful picture, we could ask why Jesus chose to reward her this way, and not anyone else.

Jesus rewarded Mary because she had endured a hard life to help Him accomplish His destiny. Mary's suffering was profound. She faced shame and gossip after becoming pregnant by the Spirit before marrying Joseph. She fled to Egypt to protect her child while Herod killed innocent children to keep his throne (Matthew 2:16-18). I can only imagine the pain that brought her soul.

Mary would have suffered emotionally as a growing separation came between her and Jesus when He told her in Luke 2, <sup>49</sup> *"Didn't*

*you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* In other words, "Mom, it's time to let me go." All parents struggle with letting their child go. For my wife, it was sending our 17-year-old daughter, Addie, to Youth With a Mission (YWAM) for six months. Even though Addie was listening to God's call on her life, it was still difficult for her mom to let her go.

Whether you have children or not, imagine Mary's suffering as she watched Jesus on trial, beaten, carrying His cross, and crucified. Witnessing this, Mary knelt, with the pain like a sword piercing her soul, a feeling foretold in Luke 2:35. **Some rewards come at a high cost.**

I love God's generosity. During Jesus' suffering, He saw Mary and had compassion for her. Jesus felt her sorrow and anticipated her loneliness. He assured Mary of His love and established a new relationship. Saying, <sup>26</sup> *"Woman, here is your son,"* <sup>27</sup> *and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."* He meant, "I am returning home, Mom. Because of this, you and I need a new relationship. To give you peace and heal your broken heart, I'm giving you John." He gave her the disciple He loved—John—since He had no possessions. From then on, John <sup>27</sup> *took her into his home.* **For Mary, the cross was a place of reward.**

God rewards those who suffer for His sake. Jesus knows our trials and needs. The Scriptures tell us in 2 Timothy 2, <sup>12</sup> *"If we endure, we will also reign with Him."* Jesus was ultimately rewarded, but it came through the cross.

The second person was his mother's sister—most scholars believe she was a woman named Salome, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John.

In Matthew 20:20-23, Salome came to Jesus and asked if her sons could have the most important places next to Jesus in His kingdom—a seat on the right hand and left hand of Jesus' throne. She wanted the best for her two sons, just like all mothers, but her request was born out of pride and selfishness. Jesus knew

how this was going to end for Him and told Salome that she did not understand what she was asking. She did not realize the price that her two sons would have to pay. James would be murdered for his faith, and John would be exiled before he went home to glory.

Salome had forgotten the truth that rewards cost something: thrones are not given; you must earn them. For James and John, and all of us, there is no crown without drinking the cup of suffering with Jesus.

Sometimes we can be very selfish in our desires. Jesus gave up the glory of heaven and became a servant for us by sacrificing His life. As we contemplate the posture of our hearts if we had been with Jesus to the end, we need to remember what Jesus asked in Matthew 20: <sup>22</sup> *“Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”* Selfishly, we say, “Oh no, Lord, I just want the answer to my prayers!” Jesus asks, “Are you willing to suffer for me?” We respond, “Oh no, Lord, I just want the blessing, not the suffering!”

I believe if Salome were here today, she would say, “The cross is a place of awakening and realization”—realization of what Jesus expected of her sons and expects of us. Contemplating what Jesus did, gave up, endured, and suffered for us is humbling and reveals the cross as a place for realizing what truly matters. **For Salome, to stand at the cross was to stand at a place of realization.**

The third person believed to be standing near the cross was <sup>25</sup> *Mary the wife of Clopas*. There is a lot of debate about who this woman was, but there are not many scholarly writings on her. I will not make assumptions about her reasons for being at the cross for the sake of writing, just to write.

The fourth person standing with the three other women was Mary Magdalene. Luke 8:2 tells us that Mary Magdalene was a woman from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. Satan held Mary in bondage for a long time and was at work to destroy her life completely by making her do terrible things. Mary was in a

hopeless situation. Then Jesus came, cast out the seven demons, redeemed her, delivered her from bondage, and set her free through a miraculous encounter.

When you or I give our lives to Jesus, we are similarly delivered from the bondage of our sin. These same marvelous changes take place in our lives when we surrender to. God begins to take control of our lives.

We step from darkness into the light.

We go from guilty to free from guilt.

We go from spiritual impoverishment to spiritual wealth as heirs with Jesus.

Talk about an amazing gift. This was what Jesus did for Mary Magdalene. He redeemed her and bought her out of her miserable condition.

Understand that redemption is costly. Standing there at the cross, Mary saw the price Jesus paid. He had to die that she might be forever redeemed and bought back from bondage. It is no wonder Mary Magdalene stood there at the cross. You will read about Mary Magdalene being at His burial and resurrection. **For Mary Magdalene, to stand at the cross was to stand at a place of redemption and a realization of what it cost her Savior.**

The fifth person standing at the cross is believed to be John. *<sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to this disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

Only one man from His inner circle of 12 stood there; the *"disciple whom he loved."* Why John alone? We know that Judas was dead, but where were the other ten? First, we need to understand that John stood at the cross, restored. He, along with the other disciples, had forsaken Jesus and fled for their lives at the Garden of Gethsemane. The difference between the other nine in John is that he came back to the cross. He was restored

and forgiven.

Followers of Jesus, you might have strayed away from God, too. We can all come back to the cross. It doesn't matter what we've done. The cross is the place to go for forgiveness, deliverance, and restoration. For John to stand at the cross was probably not the safest place to be or the easiest place to stand. It would have taken courage and love for John to come back to the cross. But listen to what John says on this topic years later in 1 John 1: <sup>9</sup> *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Jesus restored John and gave him responsibility: “John, take my place. Watch over my mom. Be a son to her.” **For John, to stand at the cross was to stand at a place of responsibility.**

If you and I had been at the cross, we would have a huge responsibility to love Jesus and to love others just like John was asked. As Jesus said later in John 20, <sup>21</sup> *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

To acknowledge the cross is to accept responsibility. Now, we must love others as Jesus loved us. **The cross is where we see God's love, and it stands as a place of reward, realization, redemption, and responsibility for believers. Near the cross is where the Lord wants us.**

1. The cross is a place of reward. Jesus knows our struggles and will reward our faithfulness.

2. The cross is a place of realization. It awakens us to the cost of following Jesus.

3. The cross is a place of redemption. For those who have not yet trusted Jesus, it is the place to begin.

4. The cross is a place of responsibility. We must go and do the work He has called us to do.





## CHAPTER 82

# JESUS' DEATH: I'LL BE BACK



Luke 23:44-56, John 19:28-42, Mathew 27:45-66,  
Mark 14:33-59

Is this chapter title a tribute to the *Terminator*? Maybe. As a kid, I loved that movie. But Jesus used the phrase long before Arnold Schwarzenegger. When I suggested “I’ll Be Back” as a title to my dad, he said, “That is a terrible idea.” Like any kid, I didn’t listen. If you also dislike the title, I already heard about it. This chapter is heavy, so I hope starting with something light eases the mood.



Luke 23:44-56

Let’s look more closely at two important details in this Scripture that can raise questions. Starting in verse 44: *<sup>44</sup>It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup>for the sun stopped shining.*

The Bible says the sun suddenly disappeared and the world went dark. The logical question for me was, can that be confirmed? Or was this just said to emphasize what happened? It’s important to note that neither Jesus nor the darkness at His death was ever denied by the Romans at that time. In fact, numerous writers outside the Bible mention this strange darkness.

Thallus, a Roman historian writing around 52 A.D., sought to explain away the “darkness” as a solar eclipse. However, Thallus’s account also described the facts of Jesus’ death as written in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. His writing also revealed that the facts of Jesus’ death were widely known and discussed in Rome as early as the middle of the first century.

Phlegon of Tralles was a Greek freedman from the second century. He wrote *De Olympiis*, a chronological and authoritative

work about the Olympics. In book 13, Phelgon reported that during the reign of Tiberius Caesar, “there was a great eclipse of the Sun, greater than had ever been known before, for at the sixth hour the day was changed into night, and the stars were seen in the heavens. An earthquake occurred in Bythia and overthrew a great part of the city of Nicæa.” This reference agrees with what is written in Matthew 27:45.

Julius Africanus, recognized as the earliest Christian historian, disputed Thallus’ claim. In his *Chronography* (c. 221 A.D.), Africanus wrote that Thallus’ writing was without reason. “An eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time...how then should an eclipse happen when the moon is almost diametrically opposite the sun?” Africanus even cited Phelgon’s work to support his argument.

All this external evidence confirms what Luke wrote about the darkness. Luke continues detailing Jesus’ death: <sup>45</sup> *“And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.”* <sup>46</sup> *“Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

<sup>47</sup> *The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”* <sup>48</sup> *When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.* <sup>49</sup> *But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.* Even a Roman soldier saw what happened and turned to follow God.

Next, you will encounter this same event from the Gospel of John, which allows us to compare perspectives. One of the amazing things about the gospels is that all four were written by different men and centered on how they saw the events unfold and what they were inspired by God to write down. When you dive into the gospels, you will see so many consistencies, further

confirming what is written about Jesus's death and resurrection as true.



## John 19:28-42

This portion of Scripture from John picks up after Jesus gave John to Mary.

*<sup>28</sup> Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."<sup>29</sup> A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. <sup>30</sup> When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

*<sup>31</sup> Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.*

To understand what happened next, consider the context: Normally, the Romans wanted the execution to take as long as possible, but because a Jewish holiday was approaching, the Jewish leaders asked the professional executioners to expedite the process. The way this was done was by breaking the legs of the person on the cross so they could no longer push up to gasp for another breath. Then they would quickly suffocate and die. Speeding up the process allowed the religious leaders to get on with their Jewish Holiday. This paints a tragically sad picture, but that was the reality that led them to make their decision.

The Jewish holiday was about to begin, the lamb was roasting, the table was set, and the leaders just wanted Jesus dead so they could move on to the festivities. So, *<sup>32</sup> The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. <sup>33</sup> But when they came to Jesus and*

*found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.* These professional executioners broke the legs of the first two because they could tell they were alive. They did not break Jesus' legs because they knew He was dead.

Could that be because of what we talked about earlier? They heard Jesus say, <sup>30</sup> *"It is finished,"* and He breathed His last breath. Could it be because they experienced the blackout and earthquake? We don't know, but we know the soldiers were confident that Jesus was dead. However, just to be certain He was dead, <sup>34</sup> *one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.* <sup>35</sup> *The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.* <sup>36</sup> *These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken,"* <sup>37</sup> *and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."*

God foretold the death of Jesus, which happened exactly as it did, fulfilling what was prophesied generations before. Yet again, if they cared to pay attention, the Jewish leaders would have noticed that Jesus just fulfilled another prophecy. Yet again, the Jewish leaders and people chose not to see the truth happening right before their eyes.

Honestly, we are no different. We go to church, we hear sermons, read our Bibles, are in small groups, and learn new things, possibly discovering that something in our life does not align with the Bible and God's design. But if we are honest, what do most of us do with the discovery that we are doing something that does not align with the Word of God? We ignore it. We continue to do things we know we shouldn't. We continue to gossip, slander, lie, cheat, steal, and so on.

The Jews knew right from wrong. They knew what to look for in a Messiah. We are no different; we also choose to overlook sin because it is too hard to change. They did not want to accept

the change Jesus brought. So here is a question to ask the Lord today: **Lord, what do I need to change to fully align my life with You?**

The Bible says the wages of sin are death. Our sins, just like the Jewish people's sins, are the reasons Jesus had to go to the cross. We can look back and think they were much worse than we are for doing this to Jesus. The reality is, all sin is equal in the eyes of God. I think our sin issues are far sadder than theirs because they didn't know Jesus was about to be raised from the dead. They didn't know Jesus really was God. We do, and yet we still sin all the time.

However, there is one other thing we need to address about Jesus' resurrection. Modern critics dispute that if Jesus rose from the dead, He likely never died. According to this line of reasoning, Jesus merely fainted into a semi-coma on the cross. He was later revived while His body lay in the tomb's coolness. Jesus then unwrapped Himself from the burial cloths, rolled the stone out of the way, and snuck off into the night.

Let's jump back into John 19 after the soldiers pierced Jesus with a sword to ensure He was dead. Starting in verse 38, it reads: *<sup>38</sup> Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. <sup>39</sup> He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. <sup>40</sup> Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. <sup>41</sup> At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup> Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

Taking all this into account, I'd like to pause here and give

you a moment to reflect on what happened. At this point, we know that Jesus went through multiple trials. He had little to no sleep. He was brutally scourged. He had a crown of thorns thrust into His head that created even more blood loss. He had nails driven through His feet and into His hands. He hung on a cross for hours. He had a spear thrust into His side by professional Roman executors to make sure He was dead.

After that, Jesus was covered in burial creams—filling the ears, nose, mouth, and so forth. If Jesus were not dead, He would certainly suffocate at this point. Then they covered the whole body in more cream and wrapped Jesus tightly in grave clothes, further suffocating Him if he were alive. Then they put Jesus in a tomb and had a stone rolled over the opening to the tomb, which was under Roman guard. The Romans knew the penalty would be death if anyone took the body of Jesus.

This theory holds that, somehow, Jesus in the tomb regained consciousness, rolled out of the wrappings, had someone clear His air passages, and then, in His weakened state, rolled a several-thousand-pound stone out of the way. Somehow, the guards did not hear this, and Jesus slipped past the professional Roman guards stationed there and went on his way. I find this scenario less than plausible. How about you?

The story is not over yet. Matthew provides further details about Jesus' burial.



### Matthew 27:45-66

When the stone was rolled in front of the tomb's opening, <sup>61</sup> *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.*

When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there the next day. The stone was still there. It was logically assumed that His body was still inside. No one thought Jesus was alive.

Everyone knew Jesus was dead.

The disciples went into hiding because the movement they thought they were starting was clearly over. But the religious leaders remembered something: <sup>62</sup> *The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.* <sup>63</sup> *“Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’”* In other words, Jesus said, **“I’ll be back!”** Hence the title!

The Pharisees continued, <sup>64</sup> *“So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”* <sup>65</sup> *“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.”* <sup>66</sup> *So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.*

From that point, Jesus’ tomb was guarded under the penalty of death. Not only was the tomb guarded, but His tomb was also sealed so that anyone could see if it had been broken into. That meant the Jewish leaders witnessed Jesus die and saw the stone rolled in front of the tomb. With the tomb sealed and additional guards posted nearby, they had nothing to worry about. Jesus was dead and gone. His movement had ended, the leaders had their power back, and the threat was over.



### Mark 14:33-59

I would like to share some additional words from Jesus regarding this matter. On Thursday night of Holy Week, Jesus was arrested around midnight in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, for a preliminary hearing.

Here are the words as recorded in Mark 14: <sup>56</sup> *Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.*

*<sup>57</sup> Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him:  
<sup>58</sup> “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’”  
<sup>59</sup> Yet even then their testimony did not agree.*

Mark told us that there were witnesses against Jesus who gave accounts that contradicted each other. Part of their **false** testimony was saying that Jesus said, “I will destroy this temple.” However, the religious leaders were unable to substantiate this accusation.

It is worth asking, “Why did people all over Jerusalem think Jesus said that, if in fact he didn’t?” He must have said something to start this rumor. That rumor stems from a teaching in John 2. There, Jesus entered the temple and was not pleased with what he saw. Jesus made a whip and drove out the money changers.

Then the Jews said to Him in John 2, <sup>18</sup> *“What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”* In other words, under whose authority can you drive us, the religious leaders, out of our temple? <sup>19</sup> *Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”* <sup>20</sup> *They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?”* But Jesus wasn’t referring to a physical building; rather, to the temple of His body. That is exactly what you will read about Him doing soon!



## LIFE APPLICATION

- How would you explain the death and resurrection of Jesus in your own words?
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...



## CHAPTER 83

# 1<sup>ST</sup> RESURRECTION EYEWITNESSES



Mark 16:1-8, Matthew 28:1-8, Luke 24:1-8,  
John 20:1-18

Proof of life... proof of death... proof of resurrection... How can we trust if any of it is true? Did Jesus rise from the dead? Skeptical people want proof; maybe you still need evidence. Well, buckle up because there is plenty of it and not just from the Bible.

Let's start with all the questions we will find answers to regarding the people who saw Jesus alive after His death.

Who were they, and over what period were these claims made?

Were the claims made by his followers alone, and is there any evidence outside of the Bible?

These are great questions! We will investigate these and more. The first passage in the Bible that mentions the resurrection and a few pieces of literature outside of the Bible will be our jumping-off point.

Here is a list of the resurrection appearances of Jesus as recorded in the Bible:

- The first resurrection appearance was to three women at the tomb (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-8, John 20:1)
- The second appearance was when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18)
- The third was to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)
- The fourth was to the two men on the road to Emmaus (Cleopas and one unnamed man; Luke 24:13-35)
- The fifth was before the ten disciples (excluding Thomas, John 20:19-25, Luke 24:36-43)
- The sixth was with the eleven disciples (Mark 6:14-18; John 20:26-31)
- The seventh was when seven disciples were fishing (John

21:1-25)

- The eighth was to the eleven disciples in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18)
- The ninth was before five hundred people at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- The tenth was before James the half-brother of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- The eleventh was with the eleven disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8)
- The twelfth was before the apostles at the time of his ascension (Acts 1:9-12; Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53)
- The last was Saul/Paul (not during the 40 days following the resurrection, Acts 9:1-6)

This lists **at least 518** people who saw Jesus alive shortly after His death. Further, their testimonies were recorded within the lifetimes of these eyewitnesses. 1 Corinthians 15 notes that of the 500, *“most of whom are still living.”*

1 Corinthians was written about 55 A.D., only 20-25 years after the resurrection, which took place in either 30 or 33 A.D. Only 20 years or so after Jesus rose from the dead, there were hundreds of people still living who claimed to have seen Jesus alive and well after His death.

The letter of James was written even earlier, giving evidence of an eyewitness to the resurrected Jesus. James was written in 49 A.D., only about 16 years after the event. The four Gospels began appearing by the 60s A.D., with two Gospels, Matthew and John, written by people who claimed to have seen Jesus alive. Mark is traditionally based on the eyewitness account of the disciple Peter. At the same time, Luke recorded testimonies from a variety of sources (Luke 1:1-4).

Ultimately, believing Jesus physically rose from death on the third day is not just a matter of faith. Facts strongly support this. Within the generation living during this time in history, many

eyewitnesses wrote accounts of their experiences. Twenty-seven different books of the New Testament were produced based on the belief in Jesus' resurrection. The 518 people saw Jesus alive again and were alive to testify to this fact. This was not a hallucination or some "ghostly" appearance. This was not some legend; this was a belief that launched Christianity.

Today, the belief that Jesus rose from the dead has led to Christianity becoming the largest religion in the world. The Bible is the most published and translated book in the history of our world. The evidence is available and substantial. The only question for you will be whether to believe the evidence or not.

Let me give you some evidence outside of the Bible. Often, people are uncertain about the existence of Jesus during this period. Not to mention His resurrection. However, if you study writings outside of the Bible, you will find few scholars who do not believe that a man named Jesus lived roughly between 2 B.C. and about 33 A.D. The reason 99% of historians believe it is because there are so many historical documents that prove Jesus was not a myth but a real person. Historical evidence for Jesus is excellent.

The Roman historian Tacitus wrote a piece around 115 A.D., which recorded the events surrounding Emperor Nero in July of 64 A.D. He was a non-Christian Roman historian writing about the fire that destroyed much of Rome. You probably learned about this in history classes.

The Roman historian Tacitus wrote:

*Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus [Jesus], from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our*

*procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition [Jesus's resurrection] thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.*

As you just read, this “resurrection” of Jesus was widely talked about in Rome! Yes, this historian called it a “superstition” because he did not believe it happened, but many people did! There is much outside of the Bible that you can read where people were talking about this man named Jesus, who rose from the dead.

Before we start reading this first account, I will pose to you two important questions you should consider.

**Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead?**

**Have you submitted your life to Jesus as the only source of salvation?**

You need to decide whether you think Jesus truly rose from the dead, and if He did, how should that affect your life?

In these final chapters, we will read about the people who actually saw Jesus risen from the dead.



Mark 16:1-8

*<sup>1</sup> When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.*

These are the three we saw in the list above. When you read the passages in the other gospels, they do not list Salome, for reasons we do not know.

For example, in Luke 24, it said Joanna was there <sup>10</sup> *“and others with them.”* It is possible that many more women went to

Jesus' tomb after His death. These women went to anoint His body because all of them knew Jesus had died. Not one of them thought Jesus was alive. They saw Jesus die and were there when He was pronounced dead by the Roman executors. They saw His lifeless body taken down from the cross.

Luke 23 used the plural *women*, not woman. The women followed Joseph to the tomb and saw Jesus' dead body lying in the tomb. Luke 23 also told us that they then went home to prepare these spices to anoint Jesus' body and did not come back right away because it was the Sabbath. Luke 23 tells us that the religious leaders and the Romans put a seal on the tomb and set guards to make sure nothing happened to the body, assuring no possibility of a claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

The followers knew Jesus was dead. The Romans knew Jesus was dead. The religious leaders knew Jesus was dead. None of them expected Jesus to rise from the dead. But the religious leaders were afraid His disciples might claim He had risen from the dead.

These Jewish leaders, who studied the Old Testament, knew to look for the signs of the future Messiah. They knew that Jesus claimed He fulfilled all the things they were looking for. They also knew Jesus claimed He would prove it by rising from the dead. However, they didn't give this a chance by agreeing to wait and see if He did. Instead, they decided to make sure that it did not happen because keeping their position of power mattered far more than the truth.

Our culture still struggles with this "power over truth" issue as well. Here is what we can learn from the events described in the Bible. **Truth is not found in culture. Truth is found in the Bible.**

That does not mean culture, science, or history cannot help in proving truth; it absolutely can. We still need to keep in mind that if culture goes against the Bible, it is not the truth. What that means is we are governed first and foremost by the word of God

—not our personal preference, our political party, our friends, our boss, or our pet issue, whatever that may be. **We base our truth in God’s Word alone.**

*<sup>1</sup> When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. <sup>2</sup> Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup> and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” <sup>4</sup> But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away...*

They probably wondered what was going on. These three women, or more, went to anoint Jesus’ body because Jesus was dead. The religious leaders were leaning hard into their personal preference that Jesus would stay that way. Bear in mind, the ladies had no idea it was guarded and sealed because that had happened after they left. They were worried if they would be strong enough to move the stone so they could get in and do what they needed to do to honor Jesus.

*<sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. Just like you would be if you went to see your dead friend and his tomb was open and some random dude is sitting in his tomb!*

*<sup>6</sup> “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

You just read about the first eyewitness account that Jesus was not where they laid him after He died. These were the first people to see Jesus’ tomb empty and to hear from an angel that Jesus was alive! The angel went on to tell them to take a message to His disciples and Peter. Why the angel said specifically to Peter, we don’t know, but many scholars think Peter had gone

back to his family and his business, while the rest were still all gathered. It could be because Jesus was going to appear to Peter before the others, and Jesus knew Peter needed to know He was coming. The bottom line was Jesus was raised from the dead and the angel gave the women instructions to alert His core disciples immediately.

*<sup>8</sup> Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.* You would likely have been afraid as well, wondering what it meant and if it could be true that Jesus had done what He said He would.



### John 20:1-18

I love the Bible because it is so real! John wrote the Gospel of John, and he called himself the disciple Jesus loved the most. Some of you have kids like this, who love to say they are the favorite! For me, it's my son Thatcher who declared his status as the favorite child during an Advent reading before our church congregation.

Mary communicated this message from the angel in a convincing way and Jesus' disciples listened to her. I love John and his way of making himself look awesome. His comment sounds like most braggadocios; he had to mention that he and Peter both ran to see Jesus, but he got there first. He obviously thought he was more loved than Peter and faster to boot! If you do not think the Bible is hilarious at times, it is because you are not really reading it! They all saw Jesus' tomb empty. I didn't count this as a resurrection appearance because Jesus was not there, nor an angel to confirm it. They confirmed what the women said and they went back to tell everyone else.

*<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.* Have you ever

wondered why Mary stayed? Why did she stay when everyone else left? Why did Mary weep? Why did Jesus' best friends shrug and leave? Why did Mary stay?

The first physical appearance of Jesus was to Mary, not one of His inner circle. I believe Mary was there because Jesus had set her free from a horror-filled life (Luke 8:2). Jesus was her everything, so it is no wonder that she was so distraught not knowing what had happened to His body. How could she leave her Savior?

Mary was so overcome with grief that when she saw two angels, she didn't even react. She has been through so much trauma recently that she was numb. But listen to this: <sup>16</sup> *Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").*

Can you picture this? Think about a moment in your life when you were broken, hurting, and could not see reality, when your worst nightmare happened. Then you have that moment when someone you love says your name and it is like daylight breaking through the darkness...you can see again, there is light at the end of the tunnel, and hope suddenly floods in!

Mary probably ran to Jesus and gave Him the biggest bear hug in the world! I am not a hugger, so for me, this would be uncomfortable and I would tell Mary to not hug me. But Jesus, being who He is, kindly said, <sup>17</sup> *"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.* He told her to tell her brothers, those who didn't stay like she did. <sup>18</sup> *Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.*

The resurrection of Jesus is what sets Christianity apart from all other world religions. Mary saw Jesus alive. One eyewitness who saw Jesus overcome the one thing that will claim all of us—death. Mary claimed that at an empty tomb, someone spoke her name, and it was Jesus, raised from the dead, and the disciples of Jesus believed her.





## CHAPTER 84

# 2<sup>ND</sup> RESURRECTION EYEWITNESSES



Matthew 27:62-66, Matthew 28:11-15

There is substantial evidence, both inside and outside the Bible, that people at the time discussed Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection. Records indicate that some claimed Jesus had risen from the dead because they saw Him. People like Saul and James, once leading critics of Christianity, became its strongest advocates after seeing the resurrected Jesus.

One outside source is a letter written by Pliny the Younger, a Roman Governor who ruled over modern-day Turkey. Pliny wrote to Emperor Trajan around 112 A.D., describing his experiences with Christians. This indicates that Christianity had spread widely throughout the Roman Empire within 80 years of Christ's death, based on Pliny's firsthand observations. In his letter, Pliny wrote:

*I was never present at any trial of Christians; therefore I do not know what are the customary penalties or investigations, and what limits are observed, whether those who recant should be pardoned, whether the name itself, even if innocent of crime, should be punished, or only the crimes attaching to that name.*

*Meanwhile, this is the course that I have adopted in the case of those brought before me as Christians. I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it, I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist, I sentence them to death.*

*For I do not doubt that whatever kind of crime it may be to which they have confessed, their pertinacity and*

*inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished. The very fact of my dealing with the question led to a wider spread of the charge, and a great variety of cases were brought before me.*

*A anonymous pamphlet was issued, containing many names. All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged, because they called upon the gods at my dictation and did reverence, and especially because they cursed Christ, a thing which it is said, genuine Christians who believe he raised from the dead cannot be induced to do.*

Before we dive into the evidence from the Bible, let's pause and revisit the core questions I asked in the last chapter:

Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Have you submitted your life to Jesus as the only source of salvation?



### Matthew 28:11-15

Starting in verse 11: ***11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.*** These guards had one job: to ensure Jesus' tomb stayed sealed for three days. Secure Jesus' body so it would still be there three days later. Make sure that no one could claim anything happened to Jesus' body.

Take into consideration that these Roman soldiers most likely did not believe in Jesus. In fact, understanding Roman history, they were probably excited at the idea that Jesus' followers might come and try to steal His body because that meant they could kill them.

Imagine these soldiers walking back to the city, knowing they must report Jesus' body missing. The sealed stone was rolled away. There was no fight. No witnesses. The tomb was open and empty, with no explanation.

To suppress claims that Jesus actually rose from the dead and did what He promised, <sup>12</sup> *the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, <sup>13</sup> telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"*

The priests did the same thing people have done throughout human history when they didn't like the outcome—they used bribery.

However, failing to keep the tomb secure would have led to the guards' deaths. So, the chief priests took care of that, too. <sup>14</sup> *"If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."* <sup>15</sup> *So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.*

With that assurance, I am sure the soldiers were more than happy to comply and spread the lies they were told. These soldiers didn't believe Jesus was God, so why would they care? Free money? Sign me up!

Notice how the priests would rather protect their image and traditions than lean into the truth of what Jesus said. Ironically, analyzing the lie they told, it actually strengthens the case for Jesus' resurrection.

Let's start with the stone. The entrance to a Jewish tomb was relatively small, but the stone needed to cover the opening would have been 4 to 6 feet in diameter and approximately six inches thick. Depending on the type of stone used, it could have weighed between 1 and 2 tons, or 2,000 to 4,000 pounds.

The rolling stone was usually set in a groove in front of the entrance and secured from falling over by a stone wall in front

of the tomb opening. Often, the groove was not level but slightly sloped. To close the tomb, the stone was rolled down the groove at a decline and came to rest in front of the entrance. To open the tomb, the stone would have to be rolled up the groove at an incline, making it seem even heavier.

One theory is that Jesus woke up and rolled the stone away Himself. We know Jesus was a stone mason, so He was a strong man. However, had been beaten within an inch of His life, likely had not eaten for four days, and had nails driven through His hands, ankles, and wrists.

Additionally, He had a spear driven through His side and lost most of His bodily fluids. He was wrapped tightly in linens and covered in 100 pounds of creams and lotions, then slept for two days. Is it probable that He suddenly woke up and slid a stone weighing over 2,000 pounds uphill in the dark with no help or handholds?

Plainly speaking, this would have been impossible for Jesus. For one healthy man, moving the stone from inside the tomb was a difficult task. For someone beaten by the Romans, it was impossible. The soldiers knew this better than anyone.

If you are still skeptical, you might say, “Well, the tomb being empty does not prove anything because the disciples could have stolen the body.” If that’s true, it would require us to believe that this scared, timid group of disciples who left Jesus were powerful enough to outmaneuver highly trained and skilled Roman guards. They would then have to silently roll the massive stone out of the way, go into the tomb, unwrap the body, and disappear with no one hearing a thing. That is unlikely.

Let me give you another reason why it was shocking that people were saying Jesus rose from the dead. In the Greco-Roman mindset, not only was this an impossible idea, but it was also an undesirable one. In Greco-Roman thought, death was a long-lasting liberation from the body. The last thing you would want

would be to return to the body. The concept of an individual being resurrected back to life in a world full of sickness, death, disease, and decay was unheard of. We would have to believe that overnight, not through discussion, debate, or religious dialogue, all these people suddenly believed resurrection from the dead was a good thing. Again, highly unlikely.

If the tomb is empty but no one has seen Jesus alive, something strange is happening. However, when hundreds claim to have seen Jesus, you should pause and ask why. Why did they make these claims within a culture that saw resurrection as undesirable? The historical evidence makes it hard not to believe Jesus rose from the dead.

Let's pivot and assume the disciples stole Jesus' body to invent Christianity for money and power. Suppose these disciples and others were simply power hungry and seized their chance. That theory is problematic, given the number of Jesus's resurrection appearances. It wasn't just one person seeing Jesus' resemblance in a grilled cheese sandwich; hundreds claimed to have seen and eaten with Him. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "Ask any of them; they'll confirm it." But ordinary Jewish people had no power at that time. Christian Jews were a small, intensely persecuted minority, targeted by Romans and Jewish leaders.

After Jesus's resurrection, Christians faced severe persecution and death. Would so many give their lives, or see their families slaughtered, for something they fabricated? No one dies for a religion they know is false. These people lost everything because they had genuinely seen the resurrected Jesus.

The famous theologian Pascal said, "I believe it is the witnesses that get their throats cut."

N.T. Wright, an English New Testament scholar, said, "The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb and the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus. Nobody was expecting this kind of thing. No kind of conversion experience would have invented it.

To suggest otherwise is to stop history and enter into a fantasy world of our own. A fantasy that would lead to their death....”

Again, if we look at this logically, the overwhelming evidence supports the conclusion that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead. If you don't think Jesus rose from the dead, what do you think happened?



### LIFE APPLICATION

- Write down your explanation of Jesus' resurrection. Share with a friend and discuss.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## CHAPTER 85

# 3RD & 4TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCES



Luke 24:13-35

Will Durant was a prominent American writer, historian, and philosopher, best known for his ambitious multi-volume work *The Story of Civilization*, which he co-authored with his wife, Ariel Durant. The series spans 11 volumes and covers the history of human civilization from ancient times through to the early 19th century. Will Durant was not a Christian, and this is what he wrote regarding Jesus and everything that happened during that period of history:

*The denial of that existence seems never to have occurred even to the bitterest gentile or Jewish opponents of nascent Christianity. It is impossible to claim that a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic, and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels.*

Will Durant did not believe in God, yet when looking back on the evidence, he said it really does seem like everyone believed Jesus existed and that all the things they claimed were true. Don't miss that many historians who spent their lives considering historical facts come to affirm the reality of Christ's existence, and the rapid growth of the early movement. We are each compelled to decide whether we believe Jesus is truly alive and to live our lives accordingly.



## Luke 24:13-32

I want to be fully clear on what was meant by the <sup>13</sup> “*same day.*” This was the same day that the women went to the tomb and found it empty; the same day Jesus appeared in person to Mary Magdalene; the same day Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves that the tomb was empty; the same day John and Peter ran back to the rest of the disciples to tell them that Jesus tomb was indeed empty.

On this “same day” after all that happened, probably after lunchtime, these guys hit the road to walk home. You just read that they were doing what all of us would do: talking about what happened and where to go from here.

Jesus does not give us the reason why He did not want them to know immediately who He was. If I ventured a guess, it was probably because Jesus wanted to help them fully understand how He fulfilled all the promises made in the Bible, and to fully understand His life, why His death happened, and why they should have expected the resurrection. They needed to grasp all that before they figured out who He was and finally understood God’s wider plan of salvation.

Now, let’s put a few things into perspective. How many people do you think lived in Jerusalem around the time of Jesus? The Roman historian Tacitus estimated the population of Jerusalem at around 600,000. The Jewish historian Josephus estimated that there were as many as 1,100,000.

We also know Jesus was crucified during Passover. Passover was one of the holidays Jews were required to observe, and the men had to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate. The population, therefore, skyrocketed. Josephus wrote that during Passover, the population of Jerusalem swelled to more than two million as Jews made pilgrimages to the Temple for the annual celebration of Israel’s liberation from slavery in Egypt.

What the disciples said to Jesus would be the same as saying, “We just had a major celebration in our closest city, and something crazy happened! Everyone knows about it, so how do you not know? What rock have you been living under?”

Jesus continued, <sup>19</sup> *“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”*

Note the phrasing, <sup>21</sup> *“we had hoped.”* They once had hope, but no longer do. They had hoped He was the Messiah, but thought they were wrong. Their heads hung low, their spirits defeated; they admitted they were wrong and that they had lost their leader. Jesus was not who they thought He was. They were going home with their tails between their legs.

The disciples did not stop there: <sup>21</sup> *“And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.”* They said that because Jews believed your soul had three days to come back. If you did not come back from a state of death within three days, your soul was gone, and there was no hope.

They were filled with hopelessness and therefore were heading home. Then they added a little more to their sad tale. <sup>22</sup> *“In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”*

These men were telling Jesus that some of the female followers caught them off guard by claiming the tomb was empty, and Jesus had risen. However, in that culture, you could not trust the testimony of a woman, so they sent some men to verify their story. Those men went and found the tomb empty, but no Jesus

standing alive, nor any angels confirming what the women said. They then assumed the women were just seeing things and likely discarded the story. Like it or not, that was the culture.

Have you ever been where they were? Hopelessly in a place where you don't know how you will ever climb out of the hole you are in? If we are honest, we have all probably been there at some point and can relate to these defeated men. But we know the rest of the story: When we are hopeless, we can find the answer in Jesus.

*<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"* Imagine their faces when He said that. Jesus called them out. He told them how foolish they were for not seeing what the women told them and what the prophets told them would happen. Sometimes we need tough love. Sometimes the kindest thing is for our shepherd, our pastor, to tell us we are being an idiot. Sometimes we need someone to look at us and say, "You are struggling because you are not doing what the Bible says!" That is what Jesus did; He called them out. He wasn't quite done. He gave them a Jesus 101 class.

*<sup>26</sup> "Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

*<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.*

*<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.*

The last meal Jesus had before His death was like this, and now Jesus was eating His first meal after His resurrection, and He did likewise. I don't think that was a coincidence because *<sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared*

*from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

This may be some of you; your hearts burn when you hear God’s word preached. You know it is right, but you have been resisting. The Holy Spirit is trying to speak to you right now. If that is you, look at how these men responded.

*<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”*

Jesus apparently told these two that He was either going to appear to Simon or had already appeared to Simon Peter. That same thing is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:5. We now have a group of women who were told by an angel that Jesus was alive and well. We have one woman and two men who physically saw Jesus alive. And lastly, one of Jesus’ closest friends.

*<sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

What was the first thing they did when they found out Jesus was alive? They believed and went on to tell others about it.

What was the first thing the women did when they found out Jesus was alive? They believed and went on to tell others.

**Here is the point: Real disciples of Jesus tell others about Jesus.** We must never forget that Jesus wants us to tell others about Him. It is so important that we tell others what we know and believe so they can be saved as well.

Christianity is not designed to be an event where you go to a place called a church one day a week, and then the rest of the week you do nothing with what you know to be true. Your faith is meant to be something you grow daily. Your faith is designed to be something you share daily with others. We are the people who should be spreading the good news of Jesus. How are you doing with that?



## CHAPTER 86

# 5TH & 6TH RESURRECTION APPEARANCES



Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-31, Mark 16:14

The Jewish historian Josephus is a figure we have referred to many times throughout *The Real Jesus* series. He recorded many things outside the Bible about Jesus' life and the early church He founded. Josephus confirmed that John the Baptist died at the hands of Herod, exactly as recorded in the Bible. He wrote about the death of James, the brother of Jesus, who was delivered to be stoned.

Josephus, who was most likely alive during Jesus' time, attested to Jesus' existence. What this also tells us is that within one lifetime of Jesus's death, knowledge of who Jesus was became so widespread that writers and historians like Josephus could refer to Jesus and expect their readers to know exactly who He was.



Luke 24:36-43

On day one of the resurrection, the men from the last chapter run back to town to tell everyone what they experienced, and while they were in the middle of sharing that story, <sup>36</sup>*Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."* <sup>37</sup>*They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.*

Jesus assured them, but they still had a hard time believing this was real and true. That should give you a lot of peace. If you have ever doubted, that is understandable. If you have ever questioned whether the Bible is true, that is okay. If you have ever struggled to believe a miracle in the Bible, know that the closest

followers of Jesus doubted. That does not make you a faithless person; it makes you hesitant like everyone else. The key is: Never focus on your doubt, focus on seeking the truth.

Jesus knew they still needed a little more reassurance, <sup>41</sup> *he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”* <sup>42</sup> *They gave him a piece of broiled fish,* <sup>43</sup> *and he took it and ate it in their presence.* I find it intriguing to remember the moment they realized who Jesus was, as described in the last chapter, which was when Jesus took the bread and gave it to them. Here we are again. Jesus was with people, and it took food for them to realize who Jesus really was. Why did it take food? We don’t know why exactly, but I encourage you to think about it.



### John: 20:19-23

This is the same story we just read about in Luke, but from John’s perspective. Jesus appeared to a larger group of people all at once. Jesus started with one person, then two, and now there are ten. Did you also notice that the laws of this world no longer bind Jesus? Jesus just went all Star Trek and teleported into their midst! The doors were locked, and He just passed through them and appeared. That was why He had to say, “peace” twice!

As Jesus stood among His disciples, He said, <sup>21</sup> *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* Jesus said He was there to send them. He didn’t say He was there to have them sit behind locked doors and study their Bibles all day. He did not say He was back, so they could warm a seat in a church one day a week and then live six days a week as if they didn’t know Him. Jesus said His expectation for them, and us, is to go and make disciples.

In chapter after chapter, we have been learning that our faith needs to be active, and we are supposed to be disciples who go and make more disciples. How are you doing at that? Are you

feeling guilty, or doubting if you can do it, so you have not even started trying? If you doubt your ability to make a disciple of Jesus who can make another disciple of Jesus, this next story is all about doubts.



## John 20:24-31

*<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (also known as Didymus,) one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”*

*But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”*

*<sup>26</sup>A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*

*<sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”*

*<sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

There are many people just like Thomas. People who say things like, “If God did for me what He has done for you, I would believe. If God just did one miracle for me, I would believe. If God would just speak to me once, I would believe. If God will just do one crazy God thing for me, then...”

If you still have doubts, please note the end of that verse: *<sup>29</sup> “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* That is for all of us who talk like Thomas. This is specifically written for all of us who have never seen Jesus. God is saying that we who are Christ followers are all blessed because we have not seen Jesus with our physical eyes, yet we believe in Him.

We now know who the fifth and sixth eyewitnesses were. I love these two stories because they are filled with people like us. People with doubts, fears, questions, and those who need assurance. Let's wrap up with the same question. What do you think happened?



### LIFE APPLICATION

- Take time this week to write down some doubts you have, or used to have, about Jesus' resurrection.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## CHAPTER 87

# 7<sup>TH</sup> RESURRECTION APPEARANCE



John 21:1-25

In 1947, a discovery clarified the debate over the Bible's accuracy. Do you know what was discovered? The Dead Sea Scrolls. A shepherd boy found these scrolls in desert caves near the Dead Sea.

Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, the earliest Old Testament manuscripts dated to about 980 A.D. The scrolls from the caves, however, date from 250 B.C. When these scrolls were compared to later manuscripts, it was confirmed that our current Bibles are nearly identical to those from over 1,000 years ago.

Old Testament scholar Dr. Gleason Archer noted, "The texts from Qumran proved to be word-for-word identical to our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted primarily of obvious slips of the pen and spelling alterations." No other historical literature has been as well preserved or as well confirmed as the Bible.

The New Testament shows a similar pattern. There are over 5,000 Greek New Testament manuscripts. This collection is the most extensive historical document group in the world. Perhaps a dozen have survived from very late dates.

Similarly, New Testament manuscripts are numerous, ancient, and widely dispersed. Historians gather texts from places like Jerusalem, Egypt, and Syria to compare variations. While some differences exist, few affect the text's meaning. As with the Old Testament, the Bible you have is almost identical to the originals. This means our Bibles are more historically accurate than any other book.

With this outside evidence in mind, let's continue to look for evidence inside the Bible itself. In the last chapter, Jesus appeared to His closest followers twice. In this next passage, some of Jesus'

disciples were still unsure about His deity. They saw Jesus die and be buried. Now, they have seen Jesus alive and well twice. Yet, they were still not, as I would phrase it, fully devoted to Jesus as the Messiah. As a result, several went back to their old jobs—the ones they had before Jesus called them. You will read how Jesus responds to them and their choice to return to their old way of life.



### John 21:1-25

Jesus appeared to seven disciples: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John (the sons of Zebedee), and two others. This was not just one or two people saying it happened, but several. Seven grown fishermen threw their net over the boat. They caught so many fish that they couldn't haul them in. A miracle happened in their midst because they listened and followed Jesus. They had no idea He was guiding them.

Pause and think about your life. When we give our lives to Jesus, He promises us that He will be with us always until the very end of the age. Jesus promises to send us the Holy Spirit, His Spirit, God's Spirit, to live inside us and guide us. So here is a question for you: **How good are you at listening to the Holy Spirit?** I encourage you to think about that.

You might say, "I've never heard from God." Some may feel they listen to God's guidance decently. Others strive to listen daily. It's tough to hear God if we don't know Him, but as we get to know God, study the Bible, and pray, we learn how Jesus speaks to us. Over time, it gets easier. The key is being willing to grow in a relationship with Jesus and follow Him even when it doesn't make sense.

For some reason, these professional fishermen listened to someone they thought was a stranger on the shore. They didn't know it was Jesus, but something prodded them to pay attention.

When they did, Jesus showed up and showed off in a big way. I hope one day you will step out in faith and see Jesus show up and show off in your life, too. Remember, they were fishing because they feared the Jesus movement was dead. They went back to life as usual.

*<sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.*

Don't you love Peter? He often acted before he thought. If you ever act before thinking, Peter is proof that God can use you, too! Think about it. They were about a football field from shore, trying to haul a huge load of fish. When Peter realized it was Jesus, he jumped into the water. He left the others and swam to shore.

This reminded me of growing up. Every time we had to unload groceries when Mom got home, my brother—who will remain nameless—always acted like Peter. He had to “use the bathroom” every time to avoid helping. Notice that before Peter jumped into the water, he put on a robe and dove in. Who adds clothing before swimming? That's Peter. He consistently gives us hope.

*<sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.*

*<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

This is a story of hope and reconciliation. Hope that no matter

how many times we make bad choices, God welcomes us back. Hope that no matter how many times we fall back into sinful habits, God will greet us with open arms. Hope that no matter how many dumb things we do in life, God can still work through tarnished people like us. Hope that no matter if we have messed up in our relationships, God's relationship with us will never be broken.

We have that hope because we can look at what Jesus does next with Peter. <sup>15</sup> *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

What does this mean? **Jesus calls us to teach new and vulnerable young Christians.** As with lambs, if no one cares for those around us, wolves or bad people can corrupt them. They can be led away from Jesus and toward spiritual death. Keep them safe, Peter. Protect and feed them. Help them grow. Every parent understands that caring for children is our job. Jesus calls us to do the same. We are to care for those not as strong in faith as we are.

<sup>16</sup> *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."* In this exchange, Jesus emphasized tending the sheep in a supervisory capacity. This is not only feeding but also guiding them or having authority over them. It expresses the full scope of pastoral oversight, both in Peter's future and in all those who would follow him in pastoral ministry.

Another cool side note for you deep-dive Bible readers is to read and study 1 Peter 5, and you will see Peter follow Jesus' example and repeat this same Greek word in his first pastoral letter to the elders of the churches of Asia Minor: <sup>2</sup> *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them.*

The point made is that Jesus calls us to care for and lead the new and vulnerable young Christians.

*<sup>17</sup>The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.*

Jesus combines different Greek words to show the job of God’s shepherds. They are to tend, care for, and provide spiritual food for all God’s people, from the youngest lambs to the full-grown sheep. This is the call to nourish and care for their souls, bringing them into mature faith. The totality of the task set before Peter and all such shepherds is made clear by Jesus. Jesus calls us to nurture new and vulnerable Christians so they become fully devoted followers of Jesus.

This is our goal as followers of Jesus. It is also the church’s goal: to help people become fully devoted followers, just as Jesus told Peter. Once you are a disciple, your goal is to help others follow Jesus and make more disciples. This is a message of hope. Jesus said this three times because Peter had denied Him three times only days before. Peter messed up, but Jesus did not hold it against him. Instead, Jesus reminded Peter that his failure did not define him. Peter was defined by his relationship with Jesus. Thankfully, so are we. **Our past mistakes do not define us. Jesus forgives and frees us!**

Peter will soon become the first church planter for Jesus. Peter, according to our Catholic brothers and sisters, became the first Pope. This man failed so often, said the wrong things, chose the wrong way to handle problems, and went on to become the person Jesus used to start the church of Christ followers. We, who are authentic believers in Jesus, are a part of that church today. How incredible!

*<sup>18</sup>Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup>Jesus said this to indicate the kind*

*of death by which Peter would glorify God.*

Jesus told Peter he was going to be crucified, just like Jesus was. This did come true. Peter died by crucifixion. What would you do if you knew you would die that way? What if you knew following Jesus meant a terrible death? Would you still follow Jesus? Would you follow Jesus if it meant you would die? Or will you only follow Jesus if you can end up with the American dream and die peacefully in your sleep?

Jesus said to him, <sup>19</sup> *“Follow me!”* <sup>20</sup> *Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”)* <sup>21</sup> *When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”*

Peter, hearing some hard news, asked Jesus about John, who was following along like a puppy dog. He wanted to know how John, who always says Jesus loves him the most, would die. <sup>22</sup> *Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”*

Jesus said what many people today need to hear: “Stop comparing! Stop worrying about whether life will be fair! Stop and just follow what I have for you. You do what I call you to do and let John worry about what I call him to do.” We are all called by Jesus to do different things, and that is good. **Live the life Jesus calls you to live, and let others do the same.**



#### LIFE APPLICATION

- Take time and think about how God has gifted you. Pray and ask Jesus how you can use those gifts to build His Kingdom. Discuss with someone close ideas of how you both could do more in your life to build God’s Kingdom.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself,



## CHAPTER 88

# 8<sup>TH</sup> RESURRECTION APPEARANCE



Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18

This chapter focuses on The Great Commission—the last conversation Matthew records. Matthew emphasizes this moment to prompt readers to reflect seriously on its meaning. This passage has influenced my life and ministry more than any other in the Bible. We each must decide if we believe Jesus is truly alive and shape our lives around that decision.



Matthew 28:16-20

*<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Jesus was alive and well and appeared to 11 of his closest friends. He charged them with what He expected of them in the days ahead. I want to point out some key things in the passage for you.

First, look at verse 18 again: *<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* This was one big claim. Jesus was claiming to have authority over literally everything. If you believe this, it should be reflected in every part of your life. We should submit to Jesus because He is the ultimate authority in all things.

Let me explain why Jesus had complete authority. Jesus

willingly gave up His life and raised Himself from the dead. Jesus triumphed over the one thing that no one in all of human history has—death. Raising from the dead showed His power over sin and death. His resurrection proved His power over Satan and demons. Philippians 2 says: *<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus has all authority. Jesus has authority over Satan, demons, angels, the natural universe, natural objects, natural laws, and forces. This explains why Jesus could appear and disappear at will, as we have seen in prior chapters. Jesus has power over stars, galaxies, planets, meteorites, weather systems: winds, rains, lightning, thunder, hurricanes, tornadoes, monsoons, typhoons, and cyclones. He has authority over all plants and animals, great and small: whales and redwoods, giant squid and giant oaks! Jesus has authority over bacteria, viruses, parasites, and germs. He has authority over industries, businesses, finance, and currency; and over nations, governments, congresses, legislatures, presidents, and kings. Jesus has authority over every soul and every moment of every life that has been or ever will be lived.

Jesus' authority is infinite because He is one with God the Father. The Father gives Him all authority, not because He ceases to be God, but because Jesus is fully God. Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth, because He is God. I submit to Jesus because He is the ultimate authority.

Let's look at something else that is important. We will skip verse 19 for now and go to the second half of verse 20: *<sup>20</sup>“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* **Here is the point: Submitting to Jesus brings comfort into our lives.**

Jesus begins with this big claim and ends with this loving and comforting statement, *<sup>20</sup>“I am with you always, to the very*

*end of the age.*” Please notice the three things that Jesus says. In this short statement, Jesus gives us identification, continuation, and duration. By identification, I mean we can clearly see that this promise is given to us, to His followers. Jesus, who has all authority over every enemy and every disease and every calamity and every futility, promises to be with us through everything we will ever go through! Look at this tremendous hope we can cling to:

*I will be their God and they will be my people.* (Jeremiah 31:33)

*I will never stop doing good to them.* (Jeremiah 32:40)

*God works for the good of those who love him.* (Romans 8:28)

*I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you.* (Isaiah 41:10)

When we face terrible threats, we can read what the apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 4: <sup>16</sup>*At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.* <sup>17</sup>*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.*

Paul lived out this promise from Jesus and experienced Jesus with him always. The all-powerful, all-ruling God we serve does not break His promise. He will always be with you.

This statement shows the continuation and duration of Jesus’ promise of comfort: ‘until the end of the age.’ As long as the world lasts, Jesus is with us. The one who defeated every enemy and has all authority assures he’ll be with us—helping, doing good, and bringing us to everlasting joy. What a great God we serve.

Now, let’s reanalyze verse 19 and Jesus’ command in this passage: <sup>19</sup>*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* <sup>20</sup>*and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* Verse 19 is a command of Jesus, not a suggestion. Do you see your mission here? Submitting to Jesus means dedicating your life to

making disciples of Jesus.

Making disciples does not mean you have to quit your job, become a pastor, or teach a Bible study. Making disciples means you intentionally live a life that sees the people around you who are broken. You look for people who are caught up in sin. You look for people who are far from Jesus. You intentionally build relationships with them to lead them toward Jesus.

Making disciples means you teach people about Jesus through the way you live your life. It means you will teach others on your sports team, choir group, band, video game friends, or anyone about Jesus through the things you choose to do or not do. It means you will lead your boyfriend or girlfriend closer to Jesus by what you decide not to do with them.

Making disciples means we live like Jesus as much as possible for the purpose of leading people toward Jesus. Then, once they come to know Jesus, we will intentionally sacrifice our time to invest in them, helping them learn all about Jesus and how to do the same with people in their lives.

Let me give you an example of what this means. In book one of *The Real Jesus* series, I told you a story about how this played out in my life. There was a man named Reed who had been dishonorably discharged from the military because of his drinking problem. I met Reed and felt God calling me to invest in this young man who hated life—hated God. He lived for the weekend so he could party.

I had to work hard to find common ground with him because we lived such different lives. I learned that he was adopted from El Salvador. As a missions pastor, I had been there many times, so we struck up a relationship and talked about what life was like there versus in the United States.

After a year of getting to know Reed over food and such, I asked him to go to El Salvador with me for a week. That is right—I invited Reed, a man who did not know Jesus, had a drinking

problem, and anger issues, to come see me share Jesus with his native people.

On that trip, Reed's eyes were opened to the kind of life he would have had if he had not been adopted. Reed was forced to spend 24 hours a day with me and see me invest in other people. Witnessing all of this, Reed was motivated to share his story with others and saw the profound impact he could have. About halfway through that trip, Reed gave his life to Jesus. He was then baptized in El Salvador.

Then we came home, and Reed was thrust back into his old life. Reed began attending church and joined our small group. Reed would still get drunk. There were many weekends when I, or someone else in our group, would have to get Reed from the bar because he was intoxicated.

Reed started to see this group of people who loved him even though he was still broken—a group of people who helped him even when it did not make sense. I invited Reed to help me work on my house so I could spend more time with him. Reed had many meals with my family. I disciplined Reed for years, through life's ups and downs.

The point is that we must dedicate our lives to making disciples of Jesus. That means we will have to live with some broken people. If our goal is to lead as many people to Jesus as possible, that is what we should do. That was Jesus' call in this passage: to reach people far from God and, through Jesus' authority and power, lead them to salvation. Then, as disciple makers, we baptize them and teach them what we have learned about Jesus. We grow alongside them. That is the entire premise of this book series: to give people a simple tool to teach them to do what Jesus said during his ministry here on Earth.

Jesus Christ, the living Lord of the universe, has commanded us to call every nation, every people, and every religion to repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance

of eternal life with the one true God. Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples among every people group. Christianity is a missionary faith. We aim to make disciples everywhere in the world. We aim to build up the church among every people group. We do not spread our faith by war or by violence, but by the demonstration of Jesus' love.

Jesus said in John 18, <sup>36</sup> *“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10, <sup>4</sup> *“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”*

As Paul said, we have spiritual weapons. We make disciples with truth. We make disciples with prayer. We make disciples with love and sacrifice. Not with swords or bullets or bombs. Which is why Jesus said in Luke 10, <sup>3</sup> *“Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”* We do not fight like this world.

What is clear from this final word of Jesus is that He is trying to move us to act. He not only says, <sup>19</sup> *“Go and make disciples,”* but He gives us tremendous encouragement, comfort, and strength to go with this promise that He would go with us and never leave us.

Jesus is wrapping up His earthly ministry with these words because He wanted us to respond. He was motivating us to act. Now it is time to respond. My aim and prayer are that you will take the next step in your engagement in disciple-making. This doesn't have to be a giant leap. Just one small step toward becoming a more fully devoted follower of Jesus.

What could that look like? Maybe today you will commit to going on a mission trip within the next year. Perhaps it means getting all the loose change you can and giving it to God. Maybe you have not yet begun using these books to disciple another person, and today you are going to ask a friend to start studying them with you. Maybe you will invite a friend to church, a youth





## CHAPTER 89

# 9<sup>TH</sup> & 10<sup>TH</sup> RESURRECTION APPEARANCES



1 Corinthians 15:6-7

In the last chapter, we saw Jesus talking with His closest followers and charging them to continue His ministry. Now you will read about the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> appearances of Jesus raised from the dead.



1 Corinthians 15:6-7

This passage begins, <sup>6</sup>“*After that...*” Most scholars agree that these conversations follow what we read last in Matthew 28 or Mark 16, after Jesus instructed the 11 disciples to make disciples, baptize, and teach about Him.

Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians. At one point, Paul did not believe Jesus was the Messiah and acted against Christians, even supporting violence.

Then one day, Paul met Jesus. When he met the resurrected Jesus, his life changed radically immediately, but he wrote about that event many years later. Paul, who once did not believe in any of this, was now writing about an event he had learned all about firsthand. He said, it was true—it was real! Are you a skeptic? Paul was, too. But as Paul set out to prove Jesus was not who He said He was, he came to know Jesus!

Paul emphasizes that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at once. If only a few said it, it might be questionable. But hundreds, all claiming the same event, make the truth of Jesus’ resurrection compelling and difficult to dismiss without strong evidence.

Paul did not stop there; he also said that of these hundreds of

witnesses, many are still living, though some have fallen asleep. In his letter, Paul urges his readers to seek out any surviving firsthand witnesses and ask them what they saw.

Think about that. This was not a theologian writing a thousand years later, or hearsay, or read in a random book. This was Paul, who did not believe in Jesus until his personal encounter with Jesus changed his life.

If you were at an event today and the speaker said that Jesus appeared on stage with him the week before, would you believe him? I doubt it, I wouldn't. Why? Because I wasn't there and didn't see Jesus.

Imagine if Jesus suddenly appeared on stage at the event you attended, spoke with you, and told you it was Him. You saw His hands and feet, and you saw the noticeable marks of His crucifixion. Would you say you saw Jesus? Most of you would, and it would have been far more potent because you saw it with your own eyes. That was what happened here, and it was powerful. The point: **Jesus' resurrection wasn't a conspiracy theory.**

I will reiterate this point, using historical writings outside the Bible. About 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Roman historian Tacitus reported that Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the fire that destroyed Rome in 64 A.D. You can read more about this account in many history books, but for now, here is a portion of Tacitus' written report:

*Nero fastened the guilt on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of Pontius Pilatus. A most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome (Tacitus, Annals 15.44, as cited*

in Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 1998).

What can we learn from this ancient and rather unsympathetic reference to Jesus and the early Christians?

First, Tacitus reports that Christians derived their name from a historical figure called Christus (from Latin), meaning Christ. He was said to have “suffered the extreme penalty,” alluding to the Roman method of execution known as crucifixion. Tacitus’ external report confirms what the Bible tells us about the death of Jesus.

Second, it’s important to note that Tacitus lived during the time of Jesus’ death and said that Christ’s death led to a “most mischievous superstition which subsequently arose not only in Judaea, but also in Rome.”

Tacitus didn’t need to list details because everyone was talking about it right after Jesus died. The rumor that Jesus had risen from the dead was spreading through Rome like wildfire.

Returning to Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, it explains even more as to why what Tacitus wrote is true. *7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.* James was Jesus’s biological half-brother. To give context, Paul came to know James much later than the time we are reading about, and Paul is referencing that time.

After returning from Arabia, Paul met James (Galatians 1:19) and likely told him about his encounter with Jesus. In turn, James described seeing his resurrected brother. Paul heard it directly from James. **Imagine what it would take for you to believe your sibling was the Son of God.**

My older brother was the good one: chess club, debate club, straight A’s, golf team. Compared to him, I got kicked out of band class, off the bus, and landed in in-school suspension after graduation. All of this is true—and yes, I’m now a pastor. However, as good as my older brother was, I would never believe he was the Son of God. And you know who else did not believe Jesus was

God's Son and the Messiah? His brother.

James did not believe Jesus was the Son of God until after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. In John 7:5, it reads, <sup>5</sup>*For even his own brothers did not believe in him.* It wasn't until after Jesus appeared to his brother James that everything changed, and His brothers became believers.

You can read more about James' significant shift in Acts 1: <sup>14</sup>*They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

What made it even more amazing is that James really did believe His brother, Jesus, was God. Here is the proof: James became the leader of the early Church at Jerusalem only after he had physical, irrefutable proof. Then James devoted himself to building the church for Jesus.

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 15 one more time. <sup>6</sup>*After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.* <sup>7</sup>*Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*

All these people believed and told everyone they knew or encountered about Jesus. We know this from biblical accounts and from Tacitus in 64 A.D., who noted how quickly the rumor about Jesus spread across the Roman Empire.

Therefore, based on all this evidence and testimony, when anyone tells you this is all made up, who are they to know what happened? Why would you listen to people thousands of years removed from the situation, when we have people who lived during this time who attest to its truth and validity? We have people who doubted during the lifetime of Jesus but saw with their eyes the truth and became believers. Why don't we listen to them?

Could it be that to trust something, we must see, feel, or touch it ourselves, as people did when Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected? I will ask this same idea from a different perspective.





## CHAPTER 90

# 11<sup>TH</sup> & 12<sup>TH</sup> RESURRECTION APPEARANCES



Luke 24:44-53, Acts 1:3-11, Mark 16:19-20

Another important source of evidence about Jesus and early Christianity can be found in the letters of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan. Pliny was the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor.

In one of his letters, dated around 112 A.D., he asked Trajan for advice on the proper conduct of legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians. Pliny said that he needed to consult the emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class, and sex stood accused of Christianity.

At one point in his letter, Pliny relayed some of the information he had learned about these Christians. Pliny said:

*They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.*

This letter offers several interesting insights into the beliefs and practices of early Christians.

First, we see that Christians regularly met on a certain fixed day for worship.

Second, their worship focused on Christ, showing their belief

in His divinity.

Third, they sang hymns to Jesus “as to a god,” a reference to the distinctive fact that, unlike other gods worshiped, Christ was a person who had lived on earth.

Let me say that again because this was distinct in Rome. They were not worshiping a man-made god like the hundreds of Roman gods. They were worshiping a man killed by the Romans who claimed to have risen from the dead to prove He was the one true God.

If this interpretation were correct, Pliny would have understood that Christians were worshiping an actual historical person as God. Of course, this agrees perfectly with the New Testament doctrine that Jesus was both God and man, which is pretty cool.

Not only does Pliny’s letter help us understand what early Christians believed about Jesus’ person, but it also reveals the high esteem in which they held His teachings. For instance, Pliny notes that Christians “bound themselves by a solemn oath” not to violate various moral standards, which derive from the ethical teachings of Jesus. Pliny’s reference to the Christian custom of sharing a common meal likely alludes to their observance of communion.

I have one last point before we move on. I am sure you have heard of Socrates. He is credited as the father of Western philosophy. He came before Plato and other philosophers. Did you read about Socrates as a kid? Do you think he was a real person? Did you know there is far less evidence that he was a real person than there is evidence that Jesus rose from the dead? Socrates never wrote anything; literally, there is not a single known document in the world that he wrote. Yet, we teach about him in school.



## Acts 1:1-11

In Acts 1, we find the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> appearances of Jesus alive and well after His death. You can also read about this in Luke 24:44-53 and Mark 16:19-20. Let's read this together from Acts:

*<sup>1</sup> In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*

The author of Acts was Luke, who also wrote the book of Luke. Luke was writing this to an influential and prominent man named Theophilus. Luke was brilliant. He was a doctor and very logical and methodical. Luke was straightforward in his writing, so if you want to know all about Jesus, his life, and his ministry, Luke's books in the Bible are for you.

I love Luke, because when you read what he wrote, you can tell he started out as skeptical as they come and came to know it was true as he studied and dove deep into the life of Jesus.

Luke clearly stated to a prominent Roman who lived during the time of Jesus that there was much evidence that Jesus did come back to life. This proof happened over 40 days.

Luke continued: *<sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." <sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

I love this part in the first chapter of Acts 1, when Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, and that His followers would be baptized in God's Spirit.

This is funny to me because Jesus made this promise, and instead of asking what that meant, the disciples went back to what was more important to them—politics! Everyone dreams of when their group will be back in power; this is not something new. We read that Jesus' followers were dreaming of political freedom, Israel's freedom, their freedom from what they think is oppressive and harmful.

Listen to how Jesus responds: *<sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."*

In one sentence, Jesus said to stop focusing on your agenda—trust God's timing and authority. Don't put your priorities above God's. God is in control and knows what will happen. Remember: **Life is not about your agenda. You need to make your life about God's agenda.**

Far too often, we want it to be all about what we want, not about what God is offering us in the moment. It is far too easy to get caught up in the politics of today and forget that life is not about politics, sports, education, your career, wealth, or losing that wealth! Our life needs to be focused on Jesus' mission for us, which was exactly where Jesus was leading His followers to understand.

*<sup>8</sup> "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* This Bible verse is one of my favorites. Jesus said, wait for the power of God to come upon you. Wait on this mysterious power. Once the mysterious Holy Spirit comes, then Jesus charged them to *do* something.

**Jesus instructed His followers to witness in Jerusalem. Jesus instructs us (His followers) to witness in \_\_\_\_\_.**  
**(your town)**

Jesus called you to reach out to people, be a witness for Him in your own town. Jerusalem was where they lived. God was

saying it is essential to reach out to those around you in your everyday life.

Next, Jesus said to minister in Judea as well. Judea was a town far enough away not to be home, but still close enough that most of them could travel there in their lifetimes. God now said, it is vital to reach those outside your everyday life.

**Jesus instructed His followers to witness in Judea. Jesus instructs us (His followers) to witness in \_\_\_\_\_.**

In the second blank, write a group of people or a place outside your daily life that is still easy to reach. This could be family or friends a few hours away, or an elderly community you drive by often but don't visit. This is a call to witness to people like you, but not in your usual routine.

Next, Jesus said to witness in Samaria. Samaria was a place for them that was filled with people from a very different culture. Jesus was saying it is crucial to reach those who are very different from us.

**Jesus instructed His followers to witness in Samaria. Jesus instructs us (His followers) to witness in \_\_\_\_\_.**

In the third blank, write down a person or group of people who would be hard for you to reach out to and witness to, but who need Jesus. Think of someone with the opposite political views, opposite sexual views, opposite social views, opposite parenting style, etc. This was a scary call for His followers because this meant witnessing to people they did not like. People with whom they did not agree on their lifestyles. People whom they may have thought didn't deserve to go to heaven.

Lastly, Jesus said to go witness to the ends of the earth, the rest of the world. God was saying it is important to reach everyone on the planet with the message of Jesus.

**Jesus instructs His followers to witness the ends of the Earth. Jesus instructs us (His followers) to witness in \_\_\_\_\_.**

In the fourth blank, write down a country God might be

calling you to go share about Jesus. This is not a call for you to literally go to every country in the world. This is the call to try to get outside your country in your lifetime. I believe parents should prioritize their kids' going on an international mission before they graduate from high school. I think all adults should go on at least one mission trip in their lives. This is a call to do what we can!

Notice that when Jesus responded, He shifted His followers to what matters: not an earthly kingdom for Israel or political revolution, but spreading God's kingdom throughout the world. How would this happen? Look at the verse 8 again. Do you see one word several times? The word *you*!

See the blanks below? Those are for your name. After you write your name in the blanks, read it aloud.

*<sup>8</sup> But \_\_\_\_\_ will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on \_\_\_\_\_; and \_\_\_\_\_ will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Jesus said to wait to receive the power of the Holy Spirit because we are powerless without it. If the Spirit of God does not reside in you, you will not be successful.

Now, stop and think about verse eight. It contains the final words of Jesus before He returned to heaven. Look at that verse with your name in it; that was the final call Jesus gave to you before He returned to heaven. **How are you doing following that call?**

Have you ever led someone to Jesus from your hometown?

Have you ever led someone to Jesus from another town?

Have you ever led someone to Jesus who comes from a very different culture than yours?

Have you ever led someone from another nation to Jesus? If not, why?

After Jesus put out this call to His followers, *<sup>9</sup> he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

I love this! They were standing there pondering all this, and an angel came and said, “Hey! Get into action!” Perhaps you need to get into action. Perhaps you have never talked about Jesus with anyone.

The whole point is that you go and talk with people about Jesus and what He did for you—to people in your home, at work, when you pray over your meal at a restaurant, when you do a service project—anywhere you go. This was Jesus’ final call to his followers. This is Jesus’ final call to you and me. Are you listening yet?



#### LIFE APPLICATION

- Take some time to pray about who God wants you to be a witness to in ALL those areas. Ask God to send you the Holy Spirit to empower you in witness to those groups or people at some point in your life.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

---

---

---

---



## CHAPTER 91

# 13<sup>TH</sup> RESURRECTION APPEARANCE



Acts 9: 1-31

You have reached the final resurrection appearance of Jesus. Before we dive into the passage, I will give you one last example of evidence outside the Bible.

In the last chapter, we looked at the Roman Emperor Trajan and one of his governors talking about Jesus and His followers. But perhaps the most remarkable reference to Jesus outside the Bible can be found in the writings of Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian.

Josephus authored a 20-volume book around 93 A.D. called *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.63-64, and within this book, Josephus talks about Jesus two times. One writing describes the condemnation of James by the Jewish Sanhedrin. Josephus points out he was “the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ.”

The other reference to Jesus in Josephus’ writings is called *Testimonium Flavianum*, 18.3.3.

*About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.*

It is difficult to believe that anyone, but a Christian, would have made these statements, but Josephus was not a Christian. However, much of Josephus' writing confirms events and beliefs in the Bible.

When he wrote "if indeed one ought to call him a man," it implies the widely held belief that Jesus was more than human. Josephus then referred to Him as "the Christ."

He commented on Jesus' crucifixion under Pilate, His resurrection appearance three days later, and how His followers continued to make more followers, who became known as Christians, who "still to this day have not disappeared."

Over the last few chapters, we have seen many sources outside the Bible that point to this explosion of belief in a man named Jesus, who was raised from the dead, and in His followers who believe He was God.

We saw in the first resurrection appearances in chapter 83 that Jesus appeared to a woman. Now, as this chapter ends, the focus shifts to a man who hated Jesus—a man whom the leaders tasked in Jesus' time to destroy the emerging church of Christians. It seems fitting to complete this book in *The Real Jesus* series with someone who was extremely skeptical, so that we can see what ultimately happened to him.

Far too many people wander through life in search of a purpose, searching for something to fill the void within them, whether that is work, sports, alcohol, promiscuity, video games, or something else.

Sometimes we try to fill our lives with good things, such as attending church, serving, or becoming extremely religious. Some of us become great rule followers in the hope that following all the rules will make us feel fulfilled.

Some try to fill every moment of every day so that we don't have to think about what is missing. We have the TV on, or the laptop in place, or our phone in our hand, and we try to fill our

time with endless things.

But here is what I know from all the counseling I have done and all the research I have read: none of that ever fills the void we have. It just makes it more evident that something is missing.

The man we will learn about in this chapter, if he were alive today, would be a church leader. Outwardly, he seemed to have it all together, but inwardly, he was missing something and tried to fill the void with religious activities. Surprisingly, he hated Jesus and Christians and hunted them down. Even more shocking, he did it all in the name of Yahweh, the same God Jesus claimed to be.

This man's story will resonate with different people. If you have ever felt not good enough, this is for you. If you feel guilty for some things that you've done wrong, this is for you! If you feel very unworthy, this is for you! Or if you find yourself thinking that you are a strong follower of God and therefore you don't have much more to learn, this chapter is really for you.

This man was doing everything right from his religious perspective. He was doing everything right based on the way his parents raised him, and he was doing everything right based on his culture. From the outside, the good religious people would have said he had it all going on, but they had no idea he was missing the most important thing.



### Acts 9:1-31

The fact that Saul, who was anti-Jesus, had direct access to the high priest was significant. Not only did Saul have direct access to the highest spiritual leader of his day, but he could move that leader into action! That would be like you going directly to the Pope, and he respects you so much that he listens and does what you request without questioning you.

Who was Saul? Saul was a Roman citizen. To be a true-blooded Roman granted all kinds of special treatment. Saul, as a child, studied under the same person who tutored the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. Saul attended the top college of his day, like Harvard, and was a top student. Saul also came from a family of devoted Jewish leaders.

Saul had everything going for him from a worldly perspective. He had everything going for him from a Jewish perspective. Saul was highly educated for his era and devoted to Jewish beliefs about God. Everything he had done since he was a child was not only right but also an act of honor to God.

Then Jesus came on the scene and began to challenge Jewish religious teaching and thinking. The Jewish leaders killed Jesus and took care of this problem, and now Saul was determined to wipe out what was left of the Jesus movement. Do you have a picture of Saul's motivations in life?

Saul's journey to seek fulfillment through religious activity is when everything changed for him. <sup>3</sup>*As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

<sup>5</sup>*"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

*"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup>"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

Imagine being Saul; he clearly knew God was speaking to him. He answered, <sup>5</sup>*"Lord."* Picture being Saul when God answered, saying He was Jesus. The person Saul hated just answered him. Can you imagine how his mind was racing?

Imagine for a second that you found out today everything you have done up to this point in your life was taking you the opposite direction you intended. Imagine how your mind would be racing to make sense of it all. That was where Saul was.

Saul has been hunting and killing the followers of Jesus,

and Jesus just proved to him that He was God. Saul was at a crossroads. Saul knew Jesus had been killed and did not believe Jesus was raised from the dead. Saul knew the followers of Jesus said Jesus was raised from the dead, but of course, he did not believe them.

I imagine Saul was pondering how it was possible that, in the middle of the desert, a big light from heaven came, knocked him to the ground, and then, out of that light, came the voice of God. How could the voice of God say, <sup>5</sup> *“I am Jesus”*?

Saul’s mind was spinning. Was God telling him he was wrong? Was God telling Saul to become a follower of Jesus? Was God telling Saul that all his religious training was wrong? Was God telling Saul that all the traditions he had followed missed the Messiah, missed Jesus, missed the point of it all? Can you imagine being Saul?

Everything Saul learned to this point was turned upside down. Everything Saul had done in his life was about to shift 180 degrees!

Now, imagine being in Saul’s posse. They could say nothing because this was clearly God, but also Jesus. How could this be?

Imagine being Ananias. Imagine God coming to you and telling you to heal this person who was arresting and killing off your friends. God tells you to go tell the man who was in charge of hunting down Christians, including you, that you are a Christian.

Really? Do you have that much faith in God? Will you follow God no matter what He asks you to do? Would you put your own life at risk for Jesus? Or even harder, would you put your family’s life at risk for Jesus? Remember, Saul hated Jesus; he was leading the anti-Jesus movement. Now God told you to let him know you’re a follower of Jesus? Would you follow that call from God?

Imagine if God said to you, <sup>15</sup> *“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer*

*for my name.”<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it.*

Ananias listened to God, no matter the potential personal cost to himself or his family. *<sup>17</sup> Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again.*

I pray for this a lot, and I know others do as well. I pray that the scales fall from people’s eyes so they can truly see what God is doing and that God should be their sole focus.

*<sup>18</sup> Saul got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.*

Imagine the fear and excitement in these disciples. Their greatest enemy was sitting in their midst; could he be faking all this? Will this destroy everything they had accomplished? You know the disciples had those fears running through their minds. That fear was mixed with the excitement that if this is true, Saul could do amazing things for God.

*<sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?”<sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

Talk about a transformation. Saul’s life was flipped upside down because he came to know the real and living God. Saul made that shift from religion to relationship. To this day, many people get caught up in religion, and they are missing the relationship with Jesus. Saul studied the word of God and became a religious leader, and yet he missed God when God walked among the living. In the same way, we can spend our whole life in church and still

miss Jesus.

*<sup>23</sup>After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him.*

Look at how fast his own kind turned on him. The people who, until a few days ago, highly respected Saul, now wanted him dead. You don't see them asking Saul what happened and trying to learn from him; they wanted to kill him for changing. Think about that. Sometimes, we desire to blind ourselves to the truth of God's movement or the truth of a situation, and we develop enmity toward someone who changes their stance toward the truth we want to avoid.

*<sup>24</sup>but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. <sup>25</sup>But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. <sup>26</sup>When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. <sup>27</sup>But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.*

Barnabas opened the door to Saul. Some of you became Christians because someone opened a door for you. Now ponder this question: **With God, are you a door opener or a door closer for people?**

When someone comes to you with an idea, do you shoot it down? When someone new comes, are you skeptical or encouraging? When someone changes, do you believe they have changed, or do you doubt their commitment to that change? Do you put people down, or do you motivate people to keep going? Do you help people grow closer to Jesus when they look at your life, or do you turn people away from Jesus because of your life?

Barnabas opened the door to Saul, and I want to encourage you to do the same. *<sup>28</sup>So Saul stayed with them and moved about*

*freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup> He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

*<sup>31</sup> Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.*

Here is the point I want to make sure we get from looking at Saul's life: **When I give my life to Jesus, my past is washed away!**

There is nothing you have done in your life that can keep you from God's love. Think about this conversion: Saul went from the chief of anti-Christian police to a leader of the global Christian movement. Saul of Tarsus later changed his name and became widely known as the Apostle Paul. About 32 years after that, the Apostle Paul was martyred for his faith in Jesus and had authored 25% of the New Testament you read today. Remember, this is the same man who hated Jesus but was now His biggest promoter. Talk about a turnaround. Paul's written words are the testimony of a man who violently persecuted the early Christians, then became new in an instant when he encountered Jesus.

You might struggle with negative thoughts about yourself, or have a poor self-image that tells you, "How could God love someone like me?" Maybe you have some bad habits that you just can't shake. You might pray to overcome your bad habits, but you just can't. If that is you, know that even Paul struggled with insecurity. Later in Paul's life he said, *"The things I want to do, I don't do, the things I don't want to do, I end up doing"* (Romans 7:19). In other words, we all seem to trap ourselves in our habits and our history, even the Apostle Paul, but no one is too far from God's love.

The feelings you may have are valid, but they're not facts. We're human, and we should have feelings. But because we feel something doesn't necessarily mean that it's true. The bottom line

is we are not changed by feeling different about ourselves; we are changed by faith in Jesus. Regardless of how you feel, what you think, or where you have been, you can be made new by entering an authentic relationship with Jesus.

There is nothing we can do in our own strength to clean ourselves up. We can become religious and look clean. We can put on clothes to cover our wounds. We can put on a fake face and look happy. We can fake it all, but understand something, only Jesus can make us new. When we give our lives to Jesus, the Bible tells us He forgives us of our sins and washes us clean as snow. Believe it.

Our transformation does not come from religion or church traditions, as we saw with Saul. Saul was a very religious person. He thought he was living a life that honored God. His culture would have said that Saul was a God-fearing person, doing the right thing, and a model follower of God. But Saul missed the boat. Saul was not destined for heaven. It was not until Saul had a real encounter with Jesus and that relationship began that everything changed.

Let me close our lessons out with one more verse from 2 Corinthians 5. <sup>16</sup> *“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*

Isn't that great news! But what does it mean to be “in Christ?” It means we have more than just head knowledge about Jesus. It's more than just going to church once in a while or even every week. Being “in Christ” means more than just saying, “Jesus was a good teacher, and I am going to listen to some of the things he said.” Being in Christ means truly submitting to the Lordship of Jesus in every area of our lives. **We have more than head knowledge—we have a relationship!** We're not just doing all this Christian stuff to make people better. We're experiencing new life.





## CHAPTER 92

### OUR JOB!



Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-20, Luke 24:46-53,  
Acts 1:8-13

Welcome to the end of *The Real Jesus* series! I hope and pray that these books have transformed the way you look at Jesus, the Bible, and your life.

I prayed a lot about how to end this series and felt the Lord wanted me to end it with a reminder. A reminder of what your job is. It does not matter if you're reading this and you are a pastor, or if you are in prison, or if you're a religious person heading the wrong direction like Saul, a stay-at-home parent, a student, etc. This is your job, regardless of who you are or what currently defines you. As authentic followers of Jesus, we all share the same calling, made clear in Jesus' final words before returning to heaven: **Make disciples of Jesus Christ.**



Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew ended his book with Jesus' final words: <sup>18</sup> *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Note where Jesus started. "Go and make disciples."

That is our job. To make more disciples of Jesus. And if you are not sure how you do that, Jesus made it abundantly clear. We do it by: <sup>19</sup> *"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*

We make disciples of Jesus by baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything He taught His original disciples. This call is for everyone, not just pastors or religious leaders.

*The Real Jesus* series was created to help you walk through the life of Jesus with others, so they can become disciples by learning what Jesus said and did. I hope you are now going through these books with others to live out Jesus' calling for you in Matthew 28.



### Mark 16:15-20

Mark ended his book with more of Jesus' final words: <sup>15</sup> *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."*

The job is the same here. To make more disciples of Jesus. Mark said we do that by preaching the gospel, which means preaching the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Mark ends with: <sup>19</sup> *After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.* <sup>20</sup> *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*



### Luke 24:46-53

Luke ended his book with more of Jesus' final words: <sup>46</sup> *He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

Note again where Jesus stated: <sup>47</sup> *"repentance for the forgiveness*

*of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.”* The job is the same here. To make more disciples of Jesus. Luke said we do that by preaching the gospel, which he makes clear comes through helping people find forgiveness of their sins through Jesus.

Just like Mark, he ends with Jesus’ ascension: <sup>50</sup> *When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.* <sup>51</sup> *While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.* <sup>52</sup> *Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.* <sup>53</sup> *And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*



## Acts 1:8-13

We covered this passage a lot in Chapter 90, but I want to reiterate verses 8-13 as we close out *The Real Jesus* series.

<sup>8</sup> *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* The job was clear: *“be my witnesses”* everywhere you go. Tell people about Jesus everywhere you go in life. Make disciples of Jesus everywhere you go.

I love what happens next: <sup>9</sup> *After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

<sup>10</sup> *They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.* <sup>11</sup> *“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

Angels appeared to tell them, “Get to work! Stop staring up into the sky. Jesus will return, but now you need to do your job—go make disciples!”

How are you doing at being a witness to others?

How are you doing at making disciples of Jesus?

How are you doing at following Jesus' final words?

How are you doing at teaching others how to obey everything you have learned from Jesus' life?

Following Jesus is not about head knowledge. It is about life transformation. How are you allowing Jesus to transform your life so that you become a disciple maker for Him?



### LIFE APPLICATION

- Commit today to actively making your life about helping others become disciples of Jesus. Take deliberate action to guide others in following Him and encourage them to do the same.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## FROM PASTOR ADAM

Congratulations on finishing the fourth book in *The Real Jesus* series! I hope that as you continue to learn about Jesus, you are applying His life-transforming teachings in your life. I hope that you are actively guiding others through these books and helping those you have guided through the books do the same with others. If you need help becoming a disciple of Jesus, or if you want to learn how to make more disciples of Jesus, please email us at [dm@familychurch.app](mailto:dm@familychurch.app), and we will be glad to assist you in any way we can. We can even partner you with someone to help you walk through these books virtually or in person and teach you how to do the same with others!

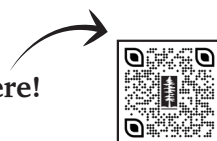
## COMPLETE THE SERIES

- *The Real Jesus* | Book 1
- *The Real Jesus* | Book 2
- *The Real Jesus* | Book 3
- *The Real Jesus* | Book 4

## NEXT FROM PASTOR ADAM

Look for the next series from Adam, *The Real Apostle Paul*, where Pastor Adam will walk through the books written by the Apostle Paul, his teachings, and how they apply to our lives today.

Find more disciple-making tools here!









Become a  
**disciple** of Jesus  
who makes  
**disciples** of Jesus.

## What does it truly mean to follow Jesus today?

In this final installment of The Real Jesus series, Dr. Adam Grill takes readers on a transformational journey through the final words and actions of Jesus Christ—culminating in the ultimate command: “Go and make disciples.”

With heartfelt teaching, practical insight, and real-life stories, *The Real Jesus: Book 4* challenges believers to move beyond religion into authentic relationship and obedience. Each chapter unpacks the final moments of Jesus’ earthly ministry, revealing how His followers were called—and still are called—to bring His message to every nation, every neighbor, and every heart.

Whether you’re a new believer, student, parent, or pastor, this book will help you:

- Understand your God-given mission to make disciples.
- Learn how to share Jesus with others through love and authenticity.
- Discover how the Holy Spirit empowers you to live out your faith boldly.
- Be reminded that following Jesus isn’t about perfection—it’s about participation in His plan.

As Dr. Grill writes, “Following Jesus is not about head knowledge; it’s about life transformation.” This final book is both a celebration and a commissioning—a call to every believer to live a life that multiplies faith and brings glory to the One who saves.

