

BLESSINGS OF THE CROSS



West Newton United
Presbyterian Church
2020 Lenten Devotional

February 26 -- ASH WEDNESDAY

***O LORD my God, you are very great; You who laid the foundations of the earth.
(PSALM 104:1, 5)***

God's love did not begin at Calvary. Before the morning stars sang together, before the world was baptized with the first light, before the first blades of tender grass peeped out, God was love. Eons before God spoke this present earth into existence, when the earth was "without form and void" and the deep, silent darkness of space stood in stark contrast to the brilliance of God's glory and His cherubim and seraphim. Even then, God was love. Before the worlds were created, He knew all about us and the need we would have some day for Christ to die for us. So, in His love, "he chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). God does not change and neither does His love. He loved you before you were born . . . He loves you now . . . and He will love you forever. Will you love Him in return today, tomorrow and forever, too?

A landscape photograph of rolling mountains under a soft, orange-hued sky, likely at sunrise or sunset. A large, semi-transparent white circle is centered over the image, containing the text "He set the earth on its foundations, never to be moved." in a black, elegant script font.

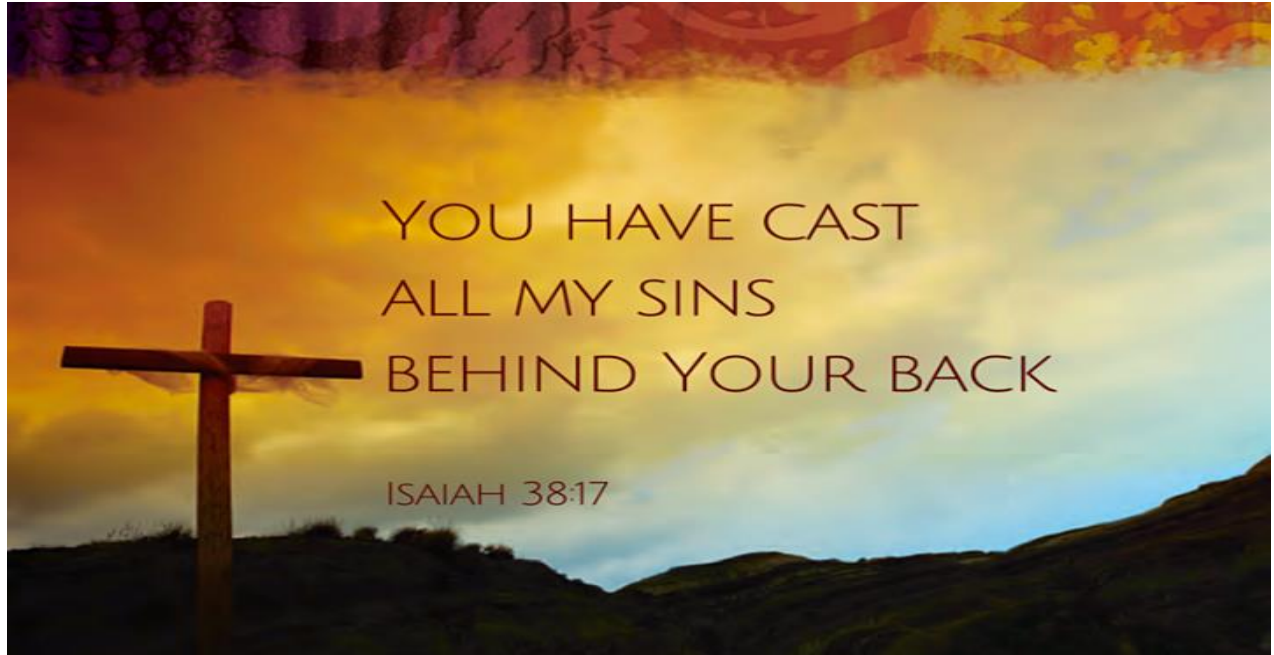
*He set the earth
on its foundations,
never to be moved.*

Psalms 104:5

February 27

You have cast all my sins behind your back. (ISAIAH 38:17)

We shall never understand the extent of God's love in Christ at the Cross until we understand that we shall never have to stand before the judgment of God for our sins. All our sins—without any exception—were placed on Christ, and He took upon himself the judgment we deserve. He finished the work of redemption. Once while crossing the North Atlantic in a ship, I looked out my bedroom window when I got up in the morning and saw one of the blackest clouds I had ever seen. I was certain that we were in for a terrible storm. I ate my breakfast in my room and spoke to my father about the storm. He said, "Oh, we've already come through that storm. It's behind us." If we are believers in Jesus Christ, we have already come through the storm of judgment. It happened at the Cross. Don't be bound by your guilt or your fears any longer, but realize that sin's penalty has already been paid by Christ, completely and fully, and that your chains are gone!



February 28

***He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
(ISAIAH 53:3)***

The scene is very simple; you'll recognize it quickly. A grove of twisted olive trees. Ground cluttered with large rocks. A low stone fence. A dark, dark night . . . See that solitary figure? . . . Flat on the ground. Face stained with dirt and tears. Fists pounding the hard earth. Eyes wide with a statement of fear. Hair matted with salty sweat. Is that blood on his forehead? That's Jesus. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. . . We see an agonizing, straining, and struggling Jesus. We see a "man of sorrows." We see a man struggling with fear, wrestling with commitments, and yearning for relief. Seeing God like this does wonders for our own suffering. God was never more human than at this hour. God was never nearer to us than when he hurt. The Incarnation was never so completely fulfilled as in the garden.

He was despised and rejected...
...wounded and killed
what we deserved, He suffered...
and by His mercy...

we are saved

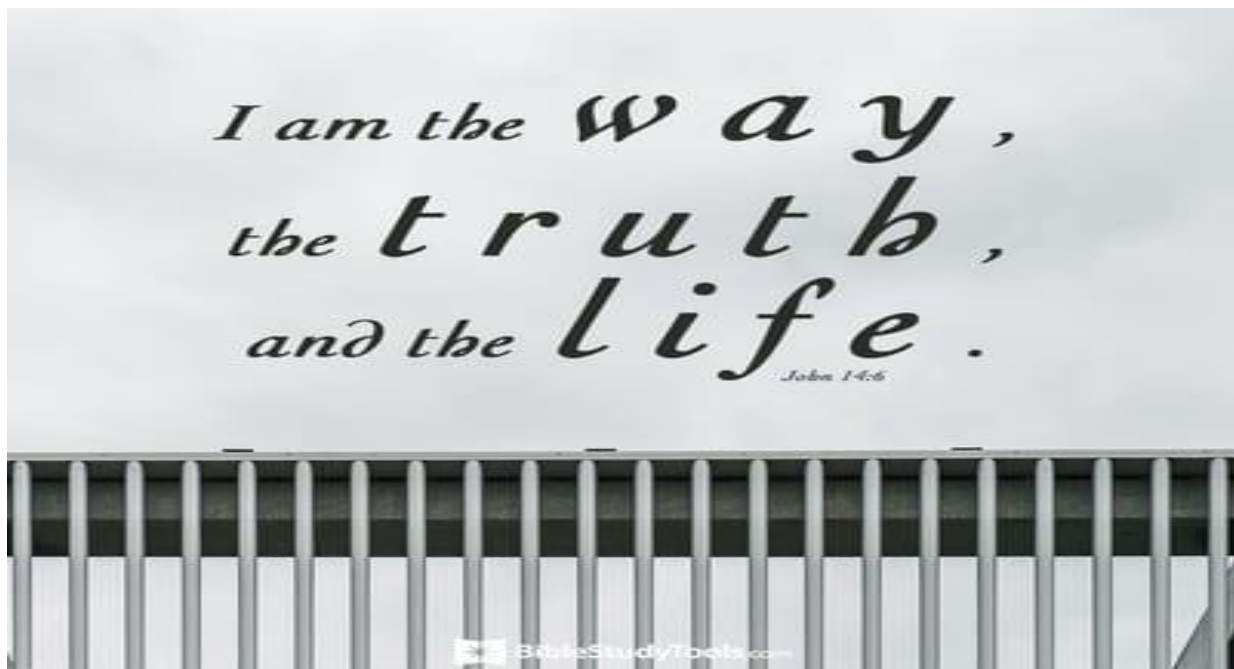
Isaiah 53:3-5



February 29

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (JOHN 14:6)

Salvation is more than something Jesus did for us on the Cross of Calvary; it is Jesus living in us. You may have been born into a Christian family or have attended a Christian church all your life, but if you haven't prayed for salvation and told God that you want to receive Jesus as your Savior, you haven't been born into the kingdom of God. You can't inherit it; you can't get it by osmosis, by transplant, or by implant; or even wish upon a star for it. You have to declare your faith in Jesus Christ for yourself. Talk to Jesus as you would to a good friend, and confess you've made some mistakes. Tell Him you can't live without Him. Ask Him to forgive you and come into your heart. Tell Him you receive Him as Lord, and thank Him for His eternal life and forgiveness.



March 1 – First Sunday in Lent

Death Through Adam, Life Through Christ

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.



March 2

Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 PETER 4:8)

King Solomon wisely admonished, “He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends” (Prov. 17:9). One of the definitions for love given in the New Testament is that, “Love does not delight in evil . . . It always protects” (1 Cor. 13:6-7). One of the greatest failures in the Bible was the Apostle Peter. His most notorious moment of sin was when, after vowing that he would die for Jesus, he actually denied ever having known Him. And he denied Him not just once but three times. Yet God, in His mercy and grace, restored Peter so completely that he was given a prominent leadership position within the early church, opening the door of opportunity for the Gentiles to receive the gospel. And Peter, who understood the shame of failure and the humiliation of sin, encouraged Christians to “love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”



March 3

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. (JOHN 16:8)

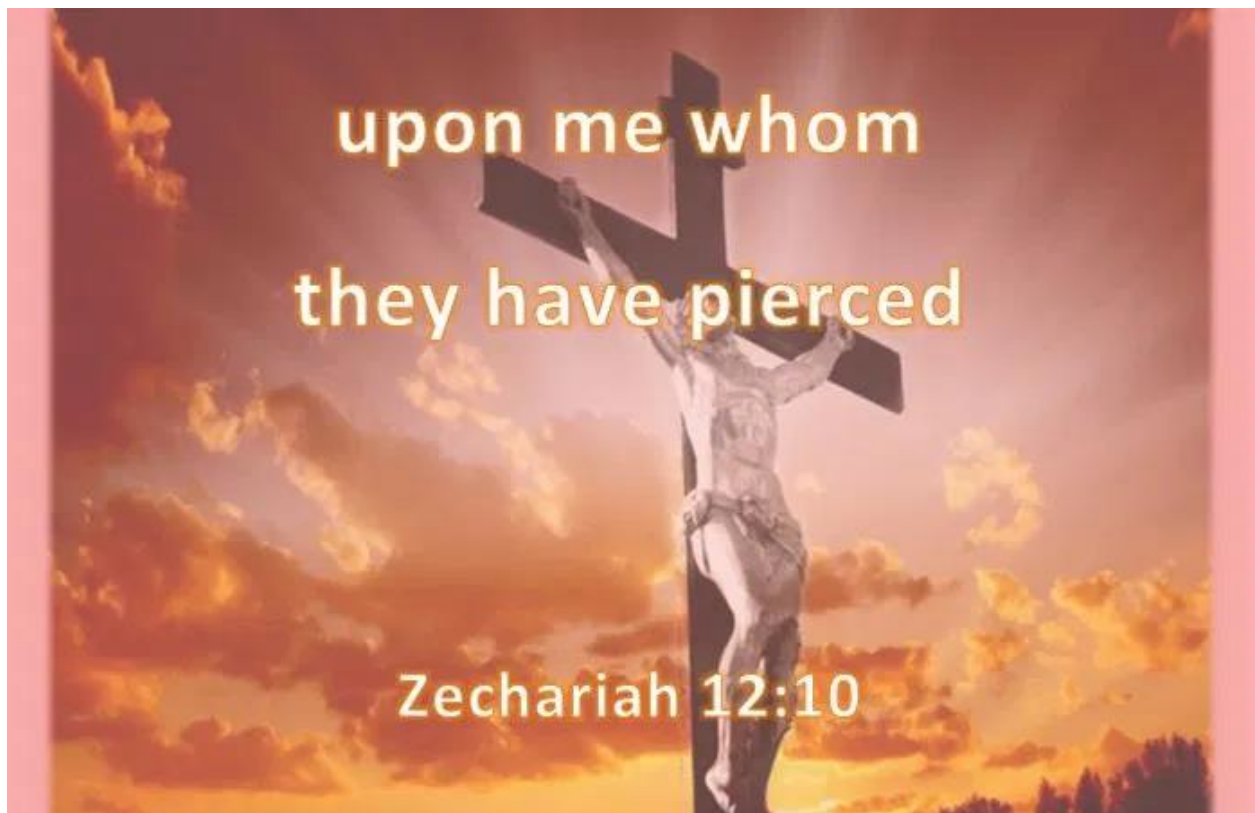
These words contain part of a gracious promise, which Jesus was pleased to make to his weeping and sorrowful disciples. The time was now drawing near, in which the Son of man was first to be lifted up on the cross, and afterwards to heaven. Kind, wondrous kind, had this merciful High-priest been to His disciples, during the time of His presence amongst them. He had compassion on their infirmities, answered for them when assaulted by their enemies, and set them right when out of the way, either in principle or practice. He neither called nor used them as servants, but as friends; and He revealed his secrets to them from time to time. He opened their understanding, that they might know the Scriptures; explained to them the hidden mysteries of the kingdom of God, when He spoke to others in parables. He became the servant of them all, and even condescended to wash their feet. The thoughts of parting with so dear and loving a Master as this, especially for a long season, must have been unthinkable.



March 4

I will pour on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. (ZECHARIAH 12:10)

Hymn writers and artists have conveyed to us a picture of Jesus hanging on a cross on a hill far away in many different ways. In fact, the place of execution was just outside the city gate, beside the main road leading into Jerusalem. And those to be crucified were only raised about eighteen inches above the ground. That meant all the dignity and modesty and purity of Jesus' physical person was stripped away and He was left naked to die in searing, scorching heat, writhing and groaning in agony, at virtually eye level with those who passed by on their way to and from the city. In their rush to get to the temple area in time to purchase a lamb for sacrifice, did the pilgrims preparing a Passover even notice the Lamb that God was being sacrificed for their sin? As Jesus poured out His life, people might have passed by without a glance. In a small way, are you pouring out your life for those who don't notice?



March 5

And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (LUKE 22:44)

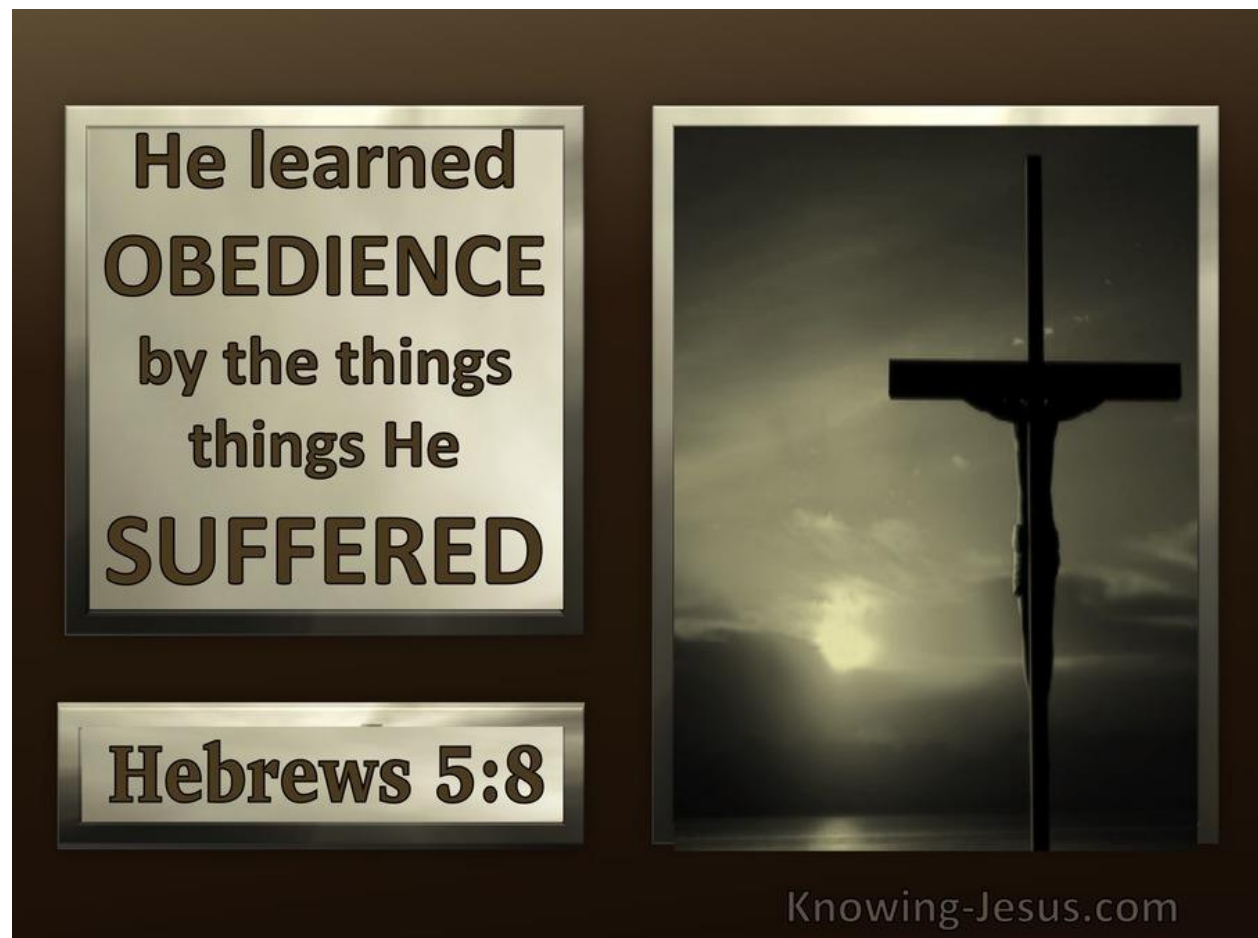
It was the corruption and wickedness of men that forced His death. It was by men's wickedness that He was reproached, mocked, beaten, and spit upon. It was by men's wickedness that Barabbas was chosen before Him. It was men's wickedness that laid the cross upon Him to bear, and that nailed Him to it, and put Him to so cruel and humiliating a death. This tended to give Christ an extraordinary sense of the greatness and hatefulness and the depravity of mankind. Because in the time of his sufferings He had that depravity set before Him as it is, without disguise, on full display. When that depravity killed Christ, it appeared in its proper colors. Here Christ saw it in its true nature, which is the utmost hatred and contempt of God; in its ultimate tendency and desire, which is to kill God; and in its greatest aggravation and highest act, which is killing a person that was God. But yet at the same time, so wonderful was the love of Christ to those who exhibited this hateful corruption, that he endured those very sufferings to deliver even them from the punishment of that very corruption.



March 6

He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (HEBREWS 5:8)

The main reason Jesus died on the cross was to save us from our sins. But the New Testament also stresses the importance of His suffering as an example for us. The Greek word for example comes from ancient school life, and refers to something written down by the teacher, so it could be followed and copied exactly by a child learning to write. Christ is our copybook. We look to Him as our teacher, and by His suffering He gave us an example to follow, so we can learn how suffering is to be borne. How did He bear it? By not giving in to despair or doubt. By looking beyond it and seeing the glory that was to come. By knowing the Father was with Him and would use His suffering for good. The same can be true for us. The author of Hebrews writes, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3)



March 7

Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross. (1 PETER 2:24)

Every aspect of the crucifixion was intended not only to hurt the victim but to shame him. Death on a cross was usually reserved for the most vile offenders: slaves, murders, assassins, and the like. The condemned person was marched through the city streets, shouldering his crossbar and wearing a placard about his neck that named his crime. At the execution site he was stripped and mocked. Crucifixion was so abhorrent that Cicero wrote, "Let the very name of the cross be far away, not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears." Jesus was not only shamed before people, he was shamed before heaven. Since he bore the sin of the murderer and adulterer, he felt the shame of the murderer and adulterer. Though he never lied, he bore the disgrace of a liar. Though he never cheated, he felt the embarrassment of a cheater. Since he bore the sin of the world, he felt the collective shame of the world, in which is contained our sins.



March 8 – Second Sunday in Lent

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus (John 3:1-15)

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”



March 9

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. (LUKE 23:34)

If Jesus forgave those who nailed Him to the cross, and if God forgives you and me, how can we withhold our forgiveness from someone else? How can we withhold your forgiveness from ourselves? If God says, "I forgive you," then the only appropriate response is to say, "God, thank You. I don't deserve it, but I accept it. And to express my gratitude, I, in turn, forgive that person who has sinned against me."

We forgive others, not because they deserve it, but because He deserves it! The only reason we have to forgive is that He commands us to, and our obedience gives up opportunity to say to Him, "Thank You for forgiving me. I love You." Our forgiveness of others then becomes an act of worship that we would not enter into except for Who He is and for the overwhelming debt of love we owe Him.



March 10

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. (ISAIAH 53:3)

From Adam's days to the tears that have been shed, and a wail has been going up to Heaven from the broken hearted . . . it is a mystery to me how all those broken hearts can stay away from Him who has come to heal them. We find the tears of Jacob put on record, when he was told that his own son was no more. His sons and daughters tried to give him comfort, but he refused to be comforted. We are also told of the tears of King David. I can see him, as the messenger brings the news of the death of his son . . . And when Christ came into the world the first sound He heard was woe—the wail of those mothers in Bethlehem; and from the manger to the Cross, He was surrounded with sorrow. We are told that He often looked up to Heaven and sighed. I believe it was because there was so much suffering around Him. It was on His right hand and on His left—everywhere on earth; and the thought that He had come to relieve the people of the earth of their burdens, and so few would accept Him, made Him sorrowful. He came for that purpose. Let the hundreds of thousands just cast their burdens on Him. He has come to bear those, as well as our sins.



March 11

***I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you.
(JEREMIAH 31:3)***

Who can describe or measure the love of God? Our Bible is a revelation of the fact that God is love. When we preach justice, it is justice tempered with love. When we preach righteousness, it is righteousness founded on love. When we preach atonement for sin, it is atonement necessitated because of love, provided by love, finished by love. When we preach the resurrection of Christ, we are preaching the miracle of love. When we preach the abiding presence of Christ, we are preaching the power of love. When we preach the return of Christ, we are preaching the fulfillment of love.

No matter what sin we have committed, no matter how black, dirty, shameful, or terrible it may be, God loves us still. We may be at the very gate of hell itself, but God loves us with an everlasting love. The proof? Jesus Christ, God's only Son, went to the Cross for us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).



March 12

The Son of Man will die, just as the Scriptures say. (MATTHEW 26:24)

God's greatest blessings often come disguised as disasters. Any doubters need to do nothing more than ascend the hill of Calvary. Jerusalem's opinion that Friday was this: Jesus is finished. What other conclusion made sense? The religious leaders had turned him in. Rome had refused to bail him out. His followers had tucked their tails and scattered. He was nailed to a cross and left to die, which he did. They silenced his lips, sealed his tomb, and, as any priest in the day would tell you, Jesus is history. Three years of power and promises are decomposing in a borrowed grave. Search the crucifixion sky for one ray of hope, and you won't find it. Such is the view of the disciples, the opinion of the friends, and the outlook of the enemies. But God is not surprised. His plan is right on schedule. Even in—especially in—death, Christ is still the king, the king over his own crucifixion. Consider what this means for your time of trouble.



March 13

"I and My Father are one." (JOHN 10:30)

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46) The words came from the cracked lips and the crushed heart of God's Son as His tortured body and fevered mind were pushed to the farthest human limits of endurance. For the first time in eternity, the Father and Son were actually separated. They were separated by all of your sins and my sins, which came between them. Even when Jesus had been alone in a crowd, or alone on a mountainside, or alone on the lake He had never truly been alone! His Father had always been with Him. He and His Father were so close they were One. To be separated with a spiritual death that was worse than a living nightmare. It was hell! No one on this side of hell will ever know the loneliness Jesus endured on the cross—in your place and mine. When we claim the Lamb as our own sacrifice for sin, we will never be separated from God, because Jesus was and we don't need to be



March 14

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us. (1 JOHN 3:1)

Learn this one truth -- the Father loves you, the Father wants you to be saved, the Father wants you to believe on the Son; the very Father who commanded Christ to lay down his life for sinners. You will notice from this that the Father is clear from the blood of all men.

He does not want you to perish. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" He is not willing that any should perish. "He wills all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He does not want you to perish. He commands Christ to go into the world, and lay down his life for sinners. Oh! It is true: the Father does not want you to perish. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." God the Father is as earnest in your salvation as Christ is. It was God's part to send the Son, and the Son's part to come and die. And as God the Son has done his part, so God the Father has done his. So that, sinners, if you perish, it is because you will not come to him, that you may have life.



March 15 – Third Sunday in Lent

Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-26)

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although, in fact, it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you, I am he."

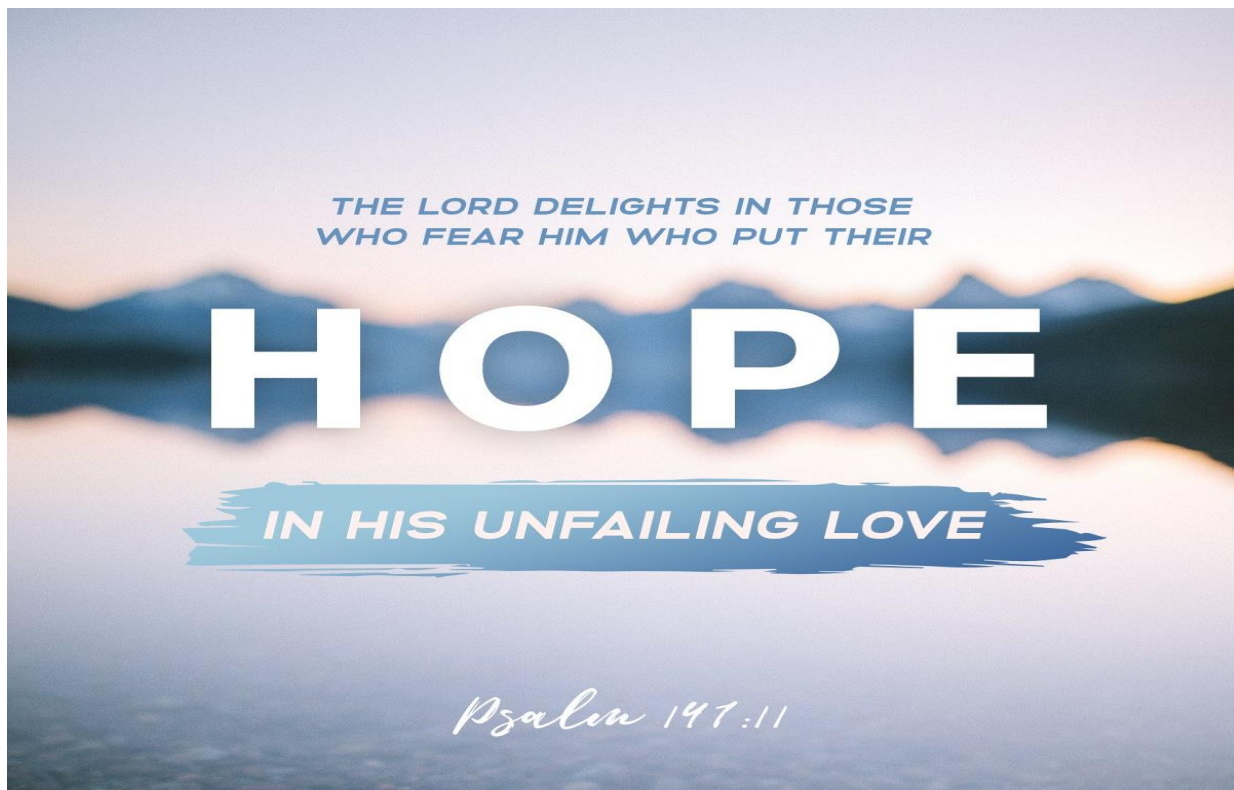


March 16

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy.

PSALM 147:11

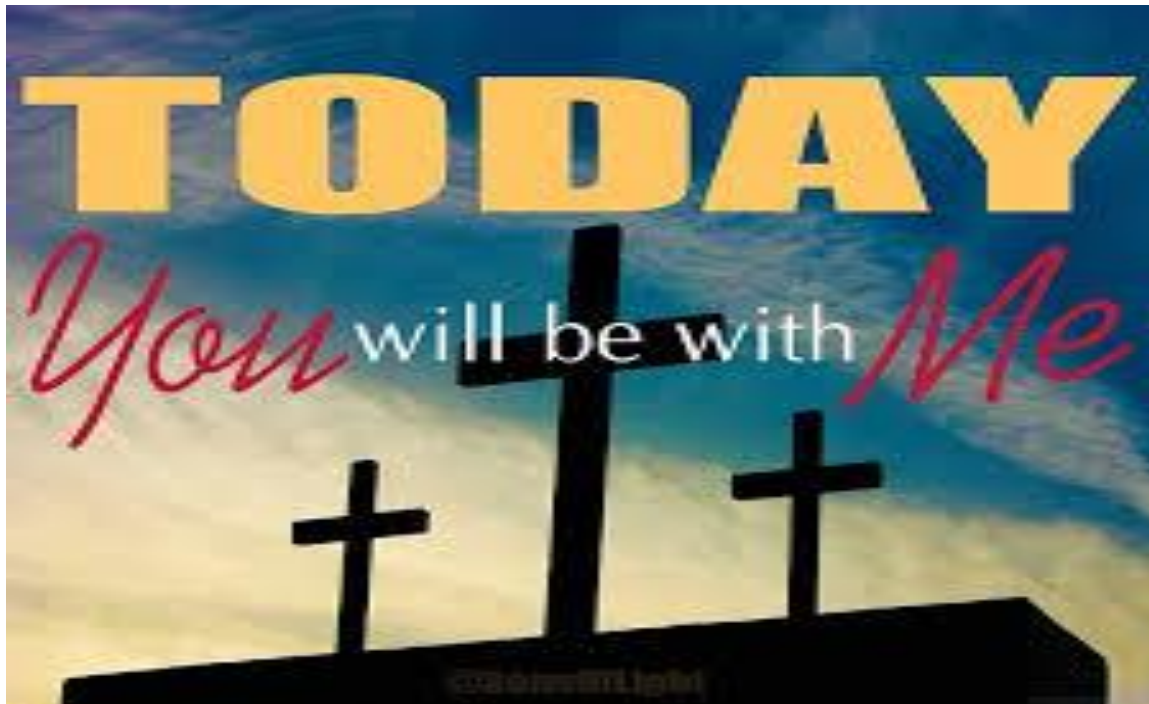
I've spent many years learning to understand what was accomplished when Jesus died on the cross, and it simply means that Jesus took all that I have coming to me—pain, sickness, failure, confusion, hatred, rejection, and death—and gave me all that He had coming to Him: all His wholeness, healing, love, acceptance, peace, joy, and life. Because of God's grace, we can pray the prayers of salvation. All we have to do is say, "Jesus, come live in me and be Lord over my life." Grace has to do with it all being Him. He does it. Not us. Grace is always a surprise. You think it's not going to happen, and it does. If it weren't for God's grace and mercy, we wouldn't even be saved for the Bible tells us, "by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:8) and "according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5).



March 17

***Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
(LUKE 23:43)***

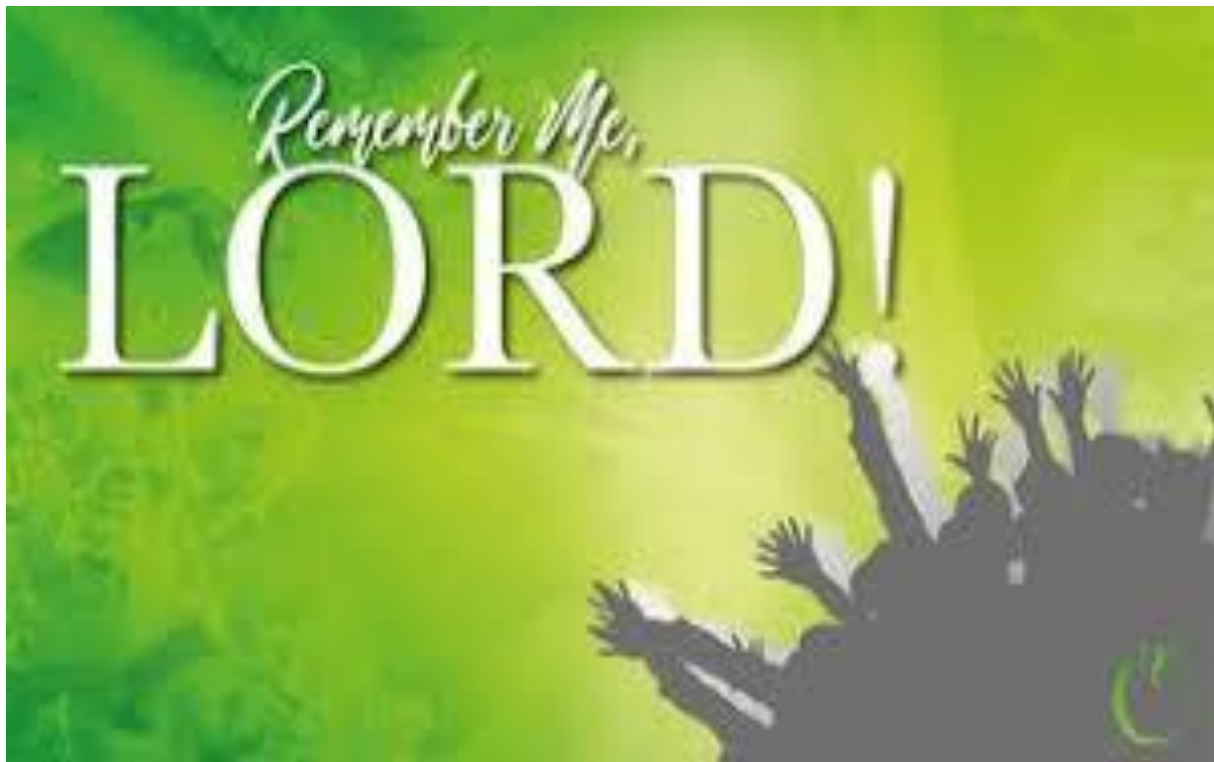
Even in the blackness of hate and evil swirling around the cross, the love of God broke through like the rays of the sun on a stormy day. That love shone down on the two thieves crucified on each side of Jesus. Their agony and fury boiled over and spewed out in a venom of curses and taunts. But one of the thieves grew quieter and quieter, until finally he rebuked his partner in crime, "We are punished justly, . . . but this man has done nothing wrong." And then, in one of the most moving conversion scenes in human history, the thief turned his face toward Jesus and pleaded in humble faith, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus turned his face toward the thief and promised, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." In the twinkling of an eye, that thief changed his eternal destiny; he passed from death to life.



March 18

We are getting what we deserve. This man has done nothing wrong. (LUKE 23:41)

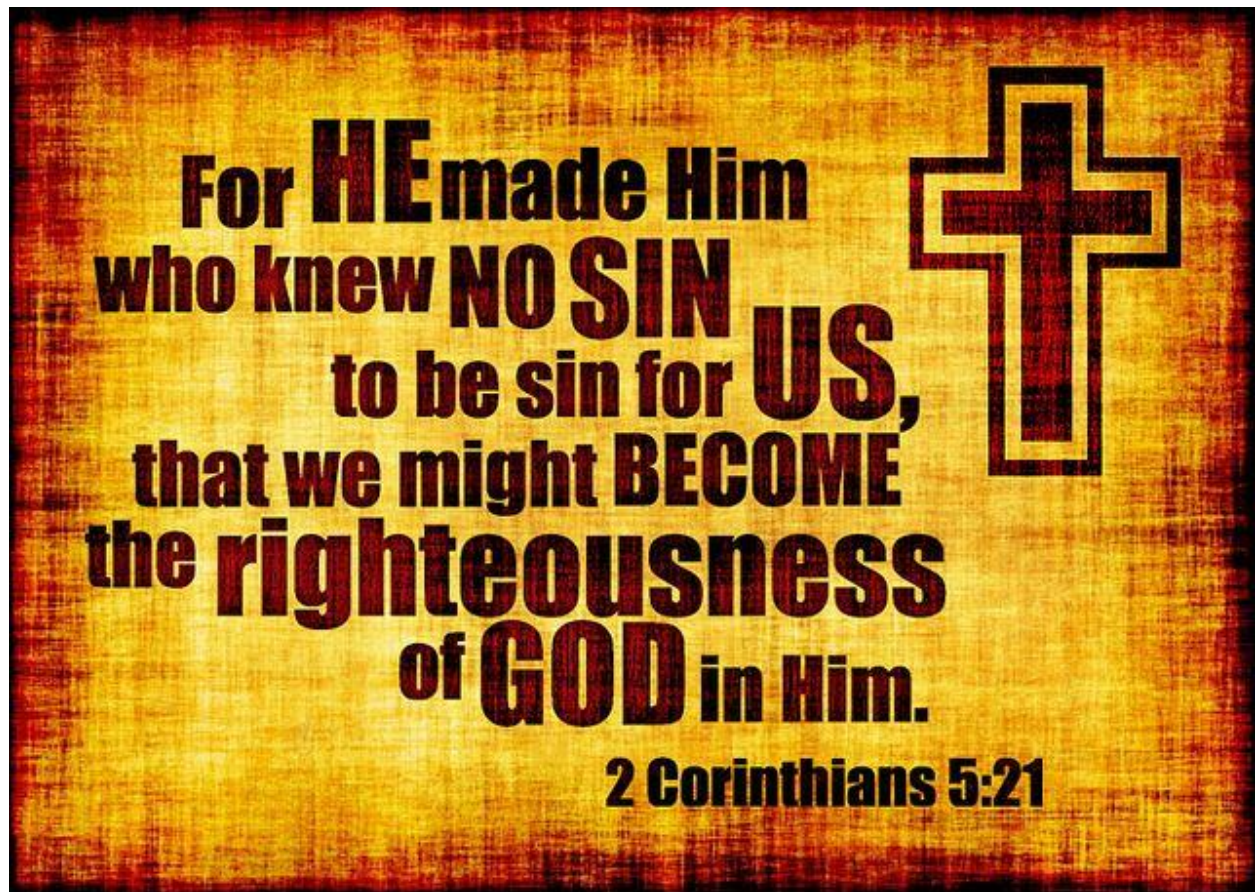
We are guilty and he is innocent. We are filthy and he is pure. We are wrong and he is right. He is not on that cross for his sins. He is there for ours. And once the crook understands this, his request seems only natural. As he looks into the eyes of his last hope, he makes the same request any Christian has made: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42 TLB). No stained-glass homilies. No excuses. Just a desperate plea for help. At this point Jesus performs the greatest miracle of the cross. Greater than the earthquake. Greater than the tearing of the temple curtain . . . He performs the miracle of forgiveness: "Today you will be with me in Paradise. This is a solemn promise" (Luke 23:43 TLB).



March 19

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 CORINTHIANS 5:21)

The spiritual suffering Jesus endured on the cross is not as easily recognizable as His physical and emotional suffering, but it was by far the worst suffering of all. We first glimpse it when Jesus was stripped of His robe and left to hang virtually naked before the world. The emotional shame and humiliation would have been acute for any dignified Jewish rabbi. Yet it wouldn't even have warranted an honorable mention alongside the spiritual humiliation He endured as He was spiritually stripped of His robe of righteousness in God's eyes. Christ didn't just take our sins upon Himself, He became those sins for us. Imagine how dirty and vile and evil and guilty and ashamed Jesus must have felt as He hung there before a holy God with our sins exposed as though they were His! Would you thank Him for bearing your sin—so that you can wear His righteousness?



March 20

***Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.
(PSALM 119:165)***

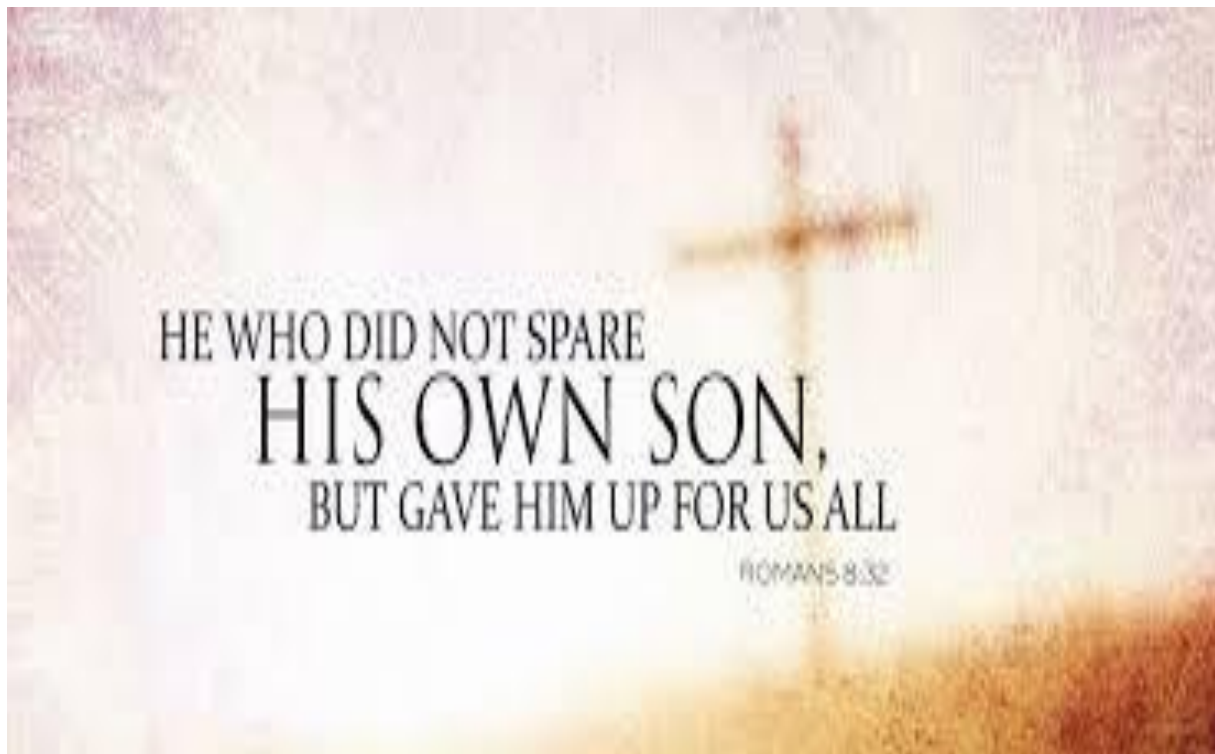
God has a plan for peace, and it is found in His Son, whom the Bible calls the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). But we have rejected God’s plan. Wars still ravage our world—and our lives. Why? Jesus said the problem is within us. “Out of the heart . . . proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21-22). What a list! Our real war is a rebellion against God—and it brings unending misery. But God longs to see this rebellion cease. That is why Christ came. By His death He provided the way for us to be reconciled to God. And when we have peace with God, we have peace in our hearts—and peace with each other. This happens as we repent and receive Christ. The war is over, for God extends a peace treaty to all who come to Christ.



March 21

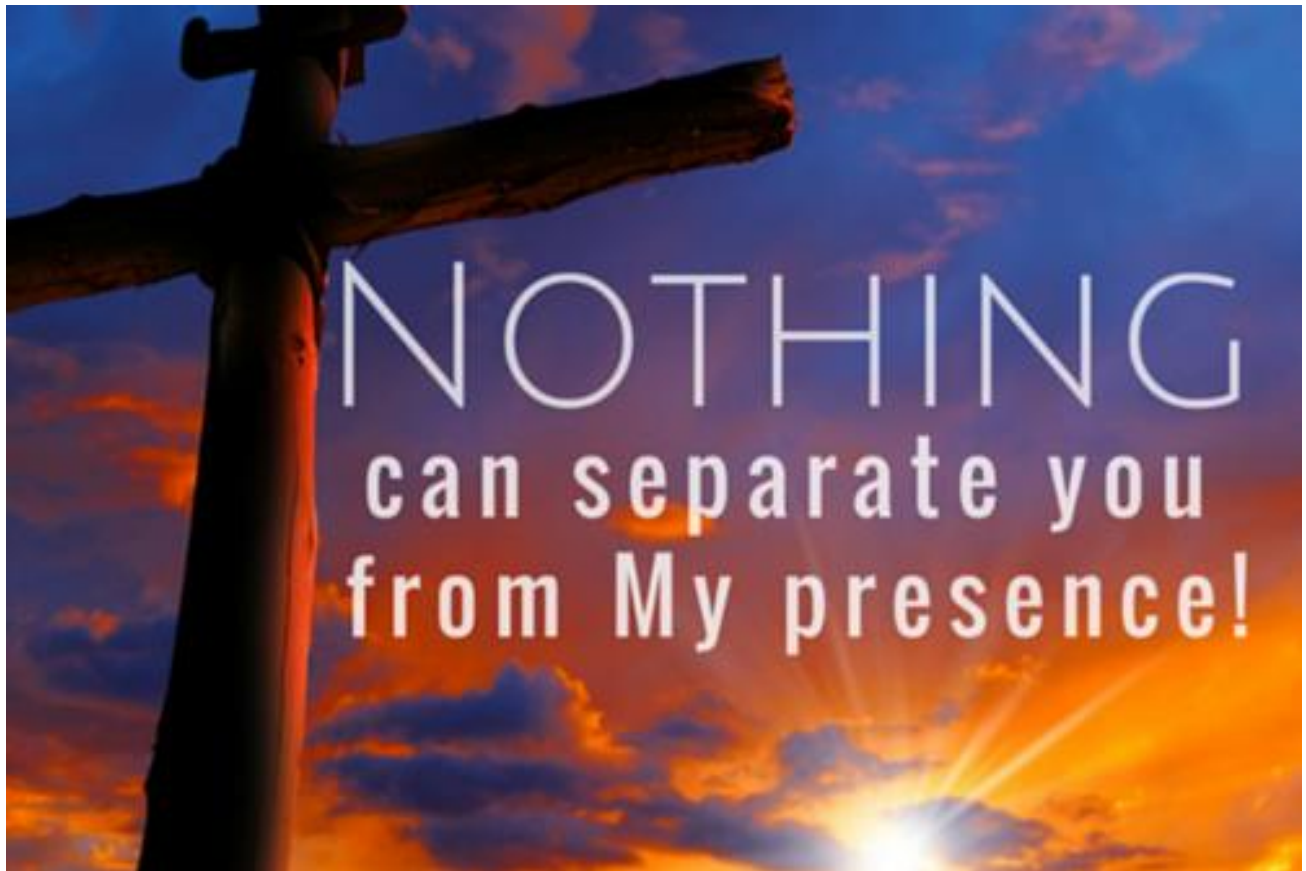
***He who did not spare his own Son . . . how will he not also, . . . give us all things?
(ROMANS 8:32)***

Jesus hung on the cross for three hours, wracked with white-hot physical pain, crushed by the weight of guilt and shame and sin that was ours but became His. Suddenly, the birds stopped chirping, the breeze stopped blowing, and everything became deathly still as darkness—pitch-black darkness—descended. The cries that could be heard were no longer just coming from the victims on the crosses but from the bystanders as they cowered, then fled in panic. Even the hardened soldiers must have shuddered at the supernatural power and anger that permeated the atmosphere. The eerie darkness that descended was not just nature feeling sorry for the Creator who was nailed to the altar of the cross. It was the very judgment of God for your sins and mine. Your sin has been judged at the cross, so you can be saved from judgment. Are you saved?



March 22 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (MATTHEW 27:50-51). It's as if the hands of heaven had been gripping the veil, waiting for this moment. Keep in mind the size of the curtain—sixty feet tall and thirty feet wide. One instant it was whole; the next it was ripped in two from top to bottom. No delay. No hesitation. What did the torn curtain mean? For the Jews it meant no more barrier between them and the Holy of Holies. No more priests to go between them and God. No more animal sacrifices to atone for their sins. And for us? What did the torn curtain signify for us? We are welcome to enter into God's presence—any day, any time. God has removed the barrier that separates us from him. The barrier of sin? Down. He has removed the curtain.



March 23

He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (JOHN 19:30)

After nine hours of standing on His feet, after being scourged, slapped, and manhandled, after six hours of hanging on the cross, the average person would have barely had enough life and breath left to even whisper. But Jesus, the Lamb of God, with life still fully flowing through His body, shouted out in a clear, ringing, triumphant voice, "It is finished." The price for our redemption had been paid! The sacrifice for our sin had been made! Sin was forgiven! Guilt was atoned for! Eternal life was now offered! Heaven has been opened! It is finished! You don't have to do more good works than bad works. You don't have to go to church every time the door opens. You don't have to climb the stairs to some statue. You don't have to be religious. You don't even have to be good! It is finished! The price has been paid!

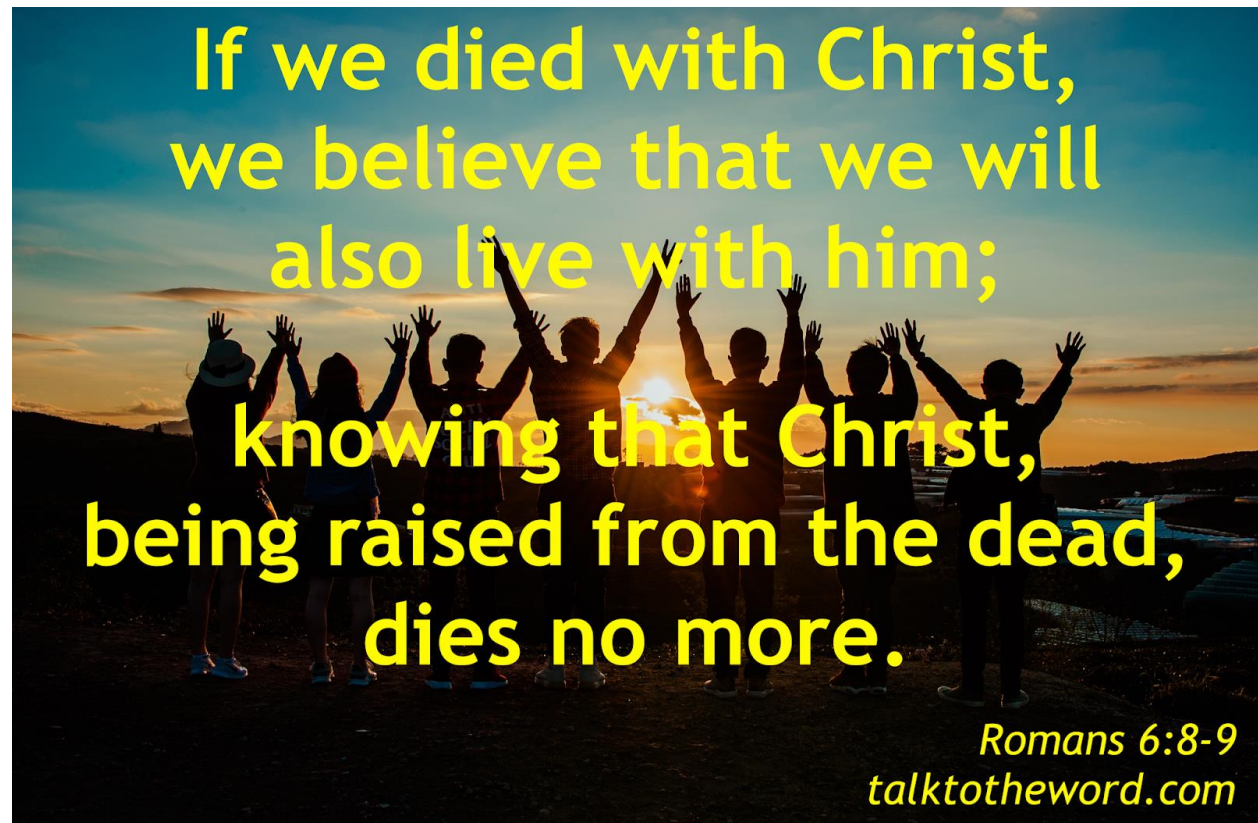


March 24

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.

(ROMANS 6:8-9)

When Jesus died on the cross, He also rose from the dead to break the power of death over anyone who receives His life. Jesus conquered death—whether at the end of life or in the multiple ways that we face death daily. In the death of our dreams, finances, health, or relationships, Jesus can bring His life to resurrect any dead place in us. Therefore, we don't have to feel hopeless. He also gives everyone who opens up to Him a quality of life that is meaningful, abundant, and fulfilling. He transcends our every limitation and boundary and enables us to do things we never would have been capable of aside from Him. He is the only one who can give us life before death as well as life hereafter. Without Him we die a little every day. With Him as our Savior we become more and more alive.



March 25

***Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.
(ROMANS 14:9)***

Early Sunday morning, in the inky blackness before dawn, soldiers stood guard over Christ's tomb. Knowing that to go to sleep on duty was an offense punishable by death, the highly trained unit remained alert. Their lives depended on it. Suddenly, "there was a violent earthquake." Almost simultaneously, the predawn darkness was split by a light so brilliant it looked like a laser of lightning! The "lightning" took the shape of an angel who seemed to reach from heaven to earth. Against the inky blackness of the night the terrifyingly awesome being fearlessly descended, walked over to the stone that blocked the tomb's entrance, flicked it away as though it were dust, and then sat on it! And the gaping hole where the stone had been, revealed there was nothing inside the tomb! The tomb was empty!



CHRIST IS LORD
OF THE DEAD THE LIVING
Romans 14:9

March 26

He is risen from the dead . . . Come, see where his body was lying.” (MATTHEW 28:6)

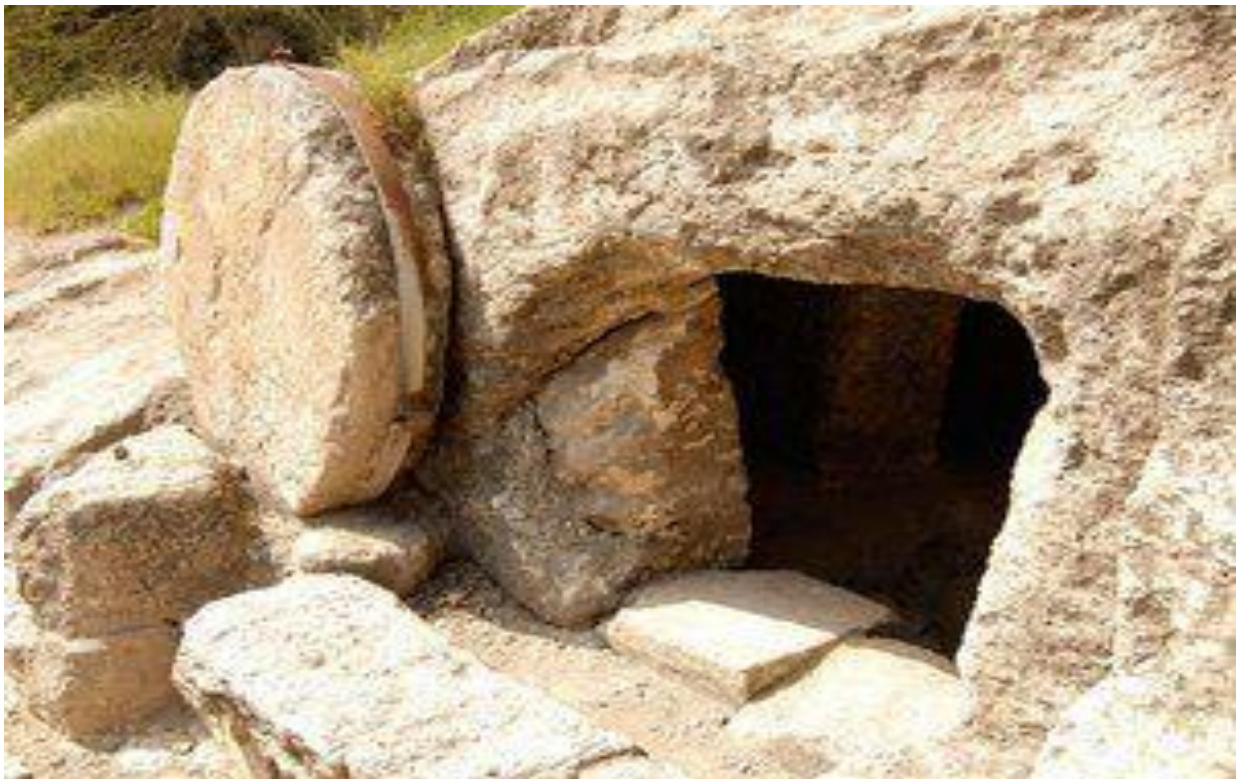
Following Christ demands faith, but not blind faith. “Come and see,” the angel invites. Shall we? Take a look at the vacated tomb. Did you know the opponents of Christ never challenged its vacancy? No Pharisee or Roman soldier ever led a contingent back to the burial site and declared, “The angel was wrong. The body is here. It was all a rumor.” They would have if they could have. Within weeks disciples occupied every Jerusalem street corner, announcing a risen Christ. What quicker way for the enemies of the church to shut them up than to produce a cold and lifeless body? But they had no cadaver to display. Helps explain the Jerusalem revival. When the apostles argued for the empty tomb, the people looked to the Pharisees for a rebuttal. But they had none to give. As A.M. Fairbairn put it long ago, “The silence of the Jews is as eloquent as the speech of the Christians!”



March 27

***They asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”
(MARK 16:3)***

The women who had been so faithfully vigilant at the cross during the long hours of Jesus’ suffering returned together first thing Sunday morning to complete the embalming process that Joseph and Nicodemus had hastily done late Friday afternoon. Their voices could be heard in the brisk early morning air as they discussed the problem of how they would roll the stone away. They knew it would be impossible for them to accomplish, even if all of them pushed together. What stone, what obstacle is ahead of you that you think you can’t move or get around, that blocks you from fulfilling your commitment to the Lord? Is it the stone of financial limitations? Practical inexperience? Physical weakness? If we steadfastly cling to our faith in Him, persevering in our commitment to Him, He will roll away the stones for us!



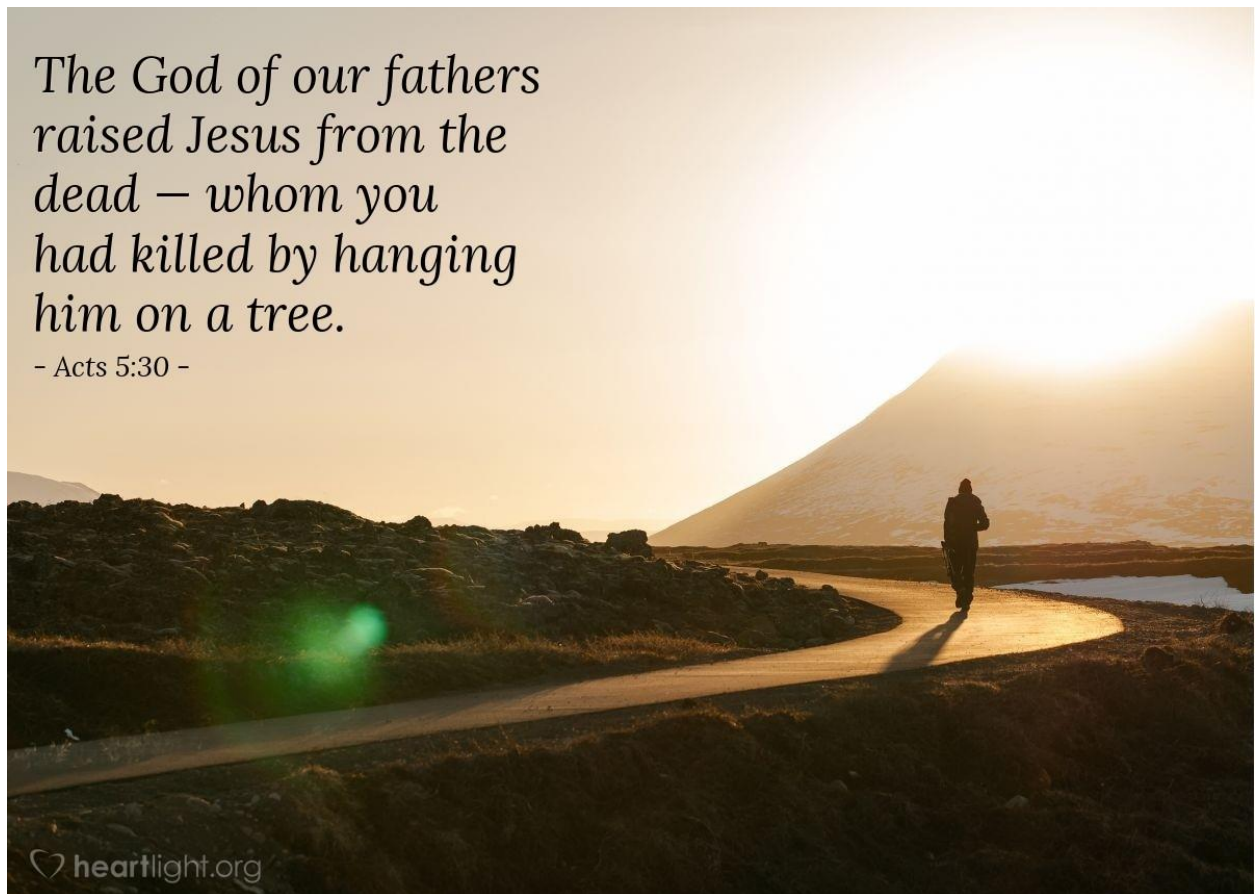
March 28

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. (ACTS 5:30)

You are not asked to trust in a dead Jesus, but in One who, though He died for our sins, has risen again for our justification. You may go to Jesus at once as to a living and present friend. He is not a mere memory, but a continually existent Person who will hear your prayers and answer them. He lives on purpose to carry on the work for which He once laid down His life. He is interceding for sinners at the right hand of the Father, and for this reason He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him. Come and try this living Savior, if you have never done so before. This living Jesus is also raised to an eminence of glory and power. He does not now sorrow as “a humble man before his foes,” nor labor as “the carpenter’s son:” but He is exalted far above principalities and power and every name that is named. The Father has given Him all power in Heaven and in earth, and He exercises this high endowment in carrying out His work of grace.

*The God of our fathers
raised Jesus from the
dead – whom you
had killed by hanging
him on a tree.*

- Acts 5:30 -



March 29 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (JOHN 11:25)

The risen Christ lingered on earth long enough fully to satisfy His adherents of the truth of His resurrection. They were not easily convinced. The apostles treated the reports of the holy women with scornful incredulity; Thomas doubted the testimony of the other apostles; and some of the five hundred to whom He appeared on a Galilean mountain doubted their own eyesight, and only believed when they heard His voice. The loving patience with which He treated these doubters showed that, though His bodily appearance was somewhat changed, He was still the same in heart as ever. This was pathetically shown too by the places which He has prayed and preached, labored and suffered—the Galilean mountain, the well-beloved lake, the Mount of Olives, the village of Bethany, and, above all, Jerusalem, the fatal city which had murdered her own Son, but which He could not cease to love.



March 30

***Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.
(1 PETER 3:18)***

One of the reference points of London is the Charing Cross. It is near the geographical center of the city and serves as a navigational tool for those confused by the streets. A little girl was lost in the great city. A policeman found her. Between sobs and tears, she explained she didn't know her way home. He asked her if she knew her address. She didn't. He asked her phone number; she didn't know that either. But when he asked her what she knew, suddenly her face lit up. "I know the Cross," she said. "Show me the Cross and I can find my way home from there." So can you. Keep a clear vision of the cross on your horizon and you can find your way home.



March 31

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (JOHN 15:13)

The precious Lord Jesus Christ is our friend. Oh, let us seek to realize this! It is not merely a religious phrase or statement, but truly He is our friend. He is the Brother “born of adversity,” the one who “sticks closer than a brother.” Who will never leave and never forsake us . . . He is willing not merely to grant this for a few months, or a year or two, but to the very end of our earthly pilgrimage. David, in Psalm 23 says: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.” Oh, how precious this is. For this “Lovely One” is coming again, and soon. Soon He will come again; and then He will take us home and there we shall be forever with Him. Oh, how precious is that bright and glorious prospect. Here again the practical point is to appropriate this to ourselves. “He is coming to take me—poor, guilty, worthless, hell-deserving me—He is coming to take me to Himself.” And to the degree in which we enter into these glorious things, the joys of heaven have already commenced!



April 1

Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. (PROVERBS 4:26)

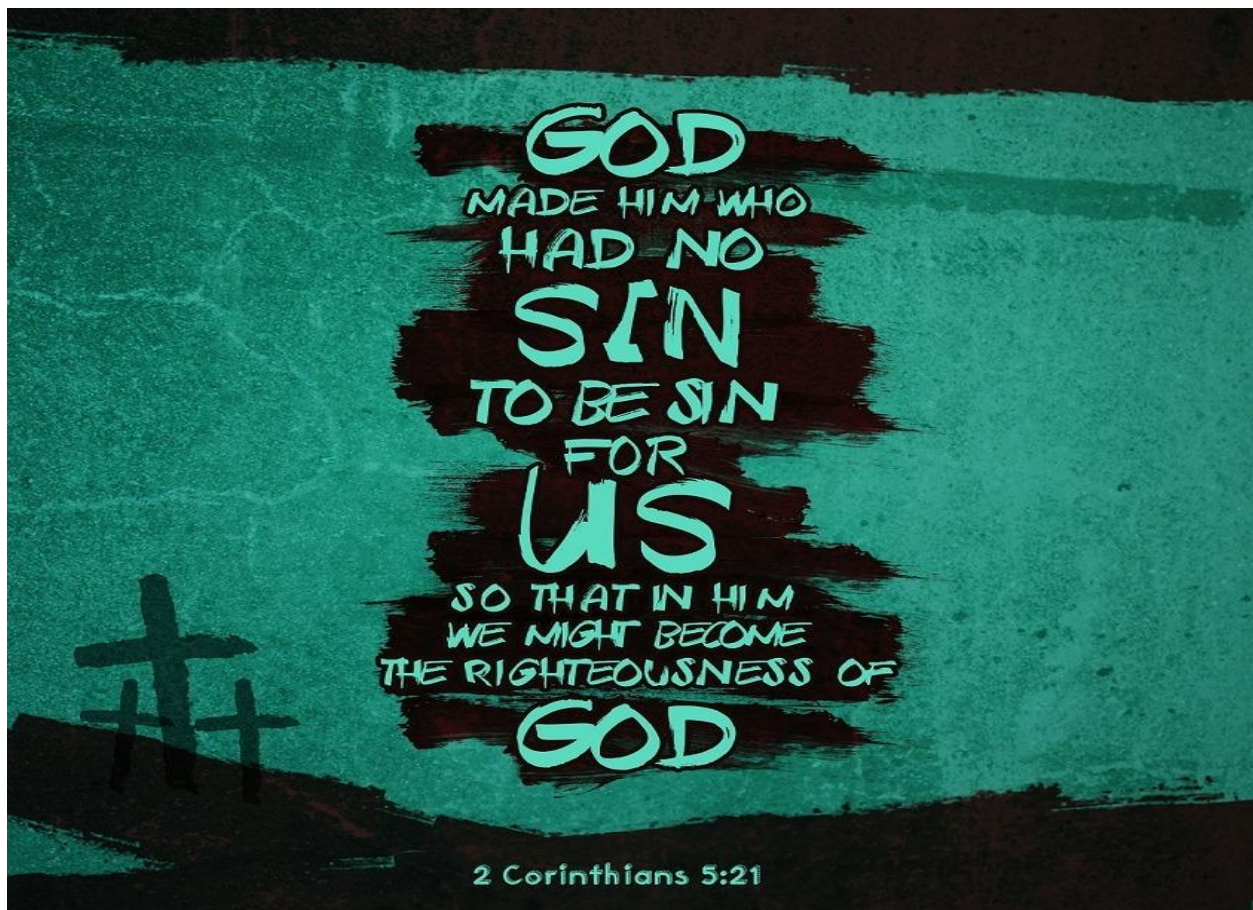
Take heed thou dost not turn into those lanes which lead out of the way. There are crooked, paths, paths in which men go astray, paths that lead to death and damnation, but take heed of all of those. Some of them are dangerous because of practice, some because of opinion, but mind them not; mind the path before thee, look right before thee, turn neither to the right hand nor to the left, but let thine eyes look right on, even right before thee; Turn not to the right hand nor to the left. "Remove thy foot far from evil." Tho the way to heaven be but one, yet there are many crooked lanes and by-paths are most beaten, most travelers go those ways; and therefore the way to heaven is hard to be found, and as hard to be kept in, by reason of these . . . the scarlet streams of Christ's blood run throughout the way to the kingdom of heaven; therefore mind that, see if thou do not find the besprinkling of the blood of Christ in the way, and if thou do, be of good cheer, thou art in the right way.



April 2

***God put on him the wrong who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:21)***

Envision the moment. God on his throne. You on the earth. And between you and God, suspended between you and heaven, is Christ on his cross. Your sins have been placed on Jesus. God, who punishes sin, releases his rightful wrath on your mistakes. Jesus receives the blow. Since Christ is between you and God, you don't. The sin is punished, but you are safe — safe in the shadow of the cross. This is what God did, but why, why would he do it? Moral duty? Heavenly obligation? Paternal requirement? No. God is required to do nothing. The reason for the cross? God loves the world.



April 3

Present yourselves to God as being alive... and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (ROMANS 6:13)

The apostle Paul, who was a splendid example of a disciplined Christian, said “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1 KJV). If we have given ourselves to Christ, then He has come to live within us, and our bodies are now the temples—the dwelling places—of the Holy Spirit. Now we must act worthy of Him who lives within us, disciplining both our bodies and minds so we do not bring dishonor to Him. We must pray as Jeremy Taylor once prayed, “Let my body be a servant of my spirit, and both body and spirit servants of Jesus.” Paul knew Christ had sacrificed His body for his salvation, and the only reasonable thing to do in response was to give his body as a living sacrifice to Christ. Let me challenge you to commit your body and your mind to Christ, “which is your reasonable service.”



April 4

Yes, he is altogether lovely. (SONG OF SOLOMON 5:16)

Our Lord Jesus makes sinners lovely. When our Lord Jesus comes in, and covers these sinful ones with His righteousness, and, at the same time, infuses into them His life, the Lord is well pleased with them for His Son's sake. Even in heaven, the infinite Jehovah sees nothing which pleases Him like His Son. The Father from eternity loved His Only-begotten, and again and again He hath said of Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." What higher encomium can be passed upon Him? Our Lord's loveliness appears in every condition: in a manger, or in the temple; by the well, or on the sea; in the garden, or on the cross; in the tomb, or in the resurrection; in His first, or in His second coming. He is not as the herb, which flowers only at one season; or as the tree, which loses its leaves in winter; or as the moon, which waxes and wanes; or as the sea, which ebbs and flows. In every condition, and at every time, "He is altogether lovely."



April 5 – PALM SUNDAY

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son . (JOHN 3:16)

As boldly as the center beam of the cross proclaims God's holiness, the crossbeam declares his love. And, oh, how wide his love reaches. Aren't you glad the verse does not read: "For God so loved the rich . . ." Or, "For God so loved the famous . . ." Or, "For God so loved the thin . . ." It doesn't. Nor does it state, "For God so loved the Europeans or Africans . . ." "the sober or successful . . ." "the young or the old . . ." No, when we read John 3:16, we simply (and happily) read, "For God so loved the world." How wide is God's love? Wide enough for the whole world.



April 6 – Monday of Holy Week

Let the saints be joyful in glory. (PSALM 149:5)

Truly we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us; for we can give thanks before the fight is done. Yes, even in the thickest of the battle we can look up to Jesus, and cry. Thanks to God. The moment a soul groaning under corruption rests the eye on Jesus, that moment his groans are changed into songs of praise. In Jesus you discover a fountain to wash away the guilt of all your sin. In Jesus you discover grace sufficient for you, grace to hold you up to the end, and a sure promise that sin shall soon be rooted out all together. "Fear not, I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by My name; thou art Mine." Ah, this turns our groans into songs of praise! How often a psalm begins with groans and ends with praise! This is the daily experience of all the Lord's people. Is it yours? Try yourselves by this. Oh, if you know not the believer's song of praise, you will never cast your crowns with them at the feet of Jesus! Dear believers, be content to glory in your infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon you. Glory, glory, glory to the Lamb!



April 7 – Tuesday of Holy Week

You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth. (PSALM 71:5)

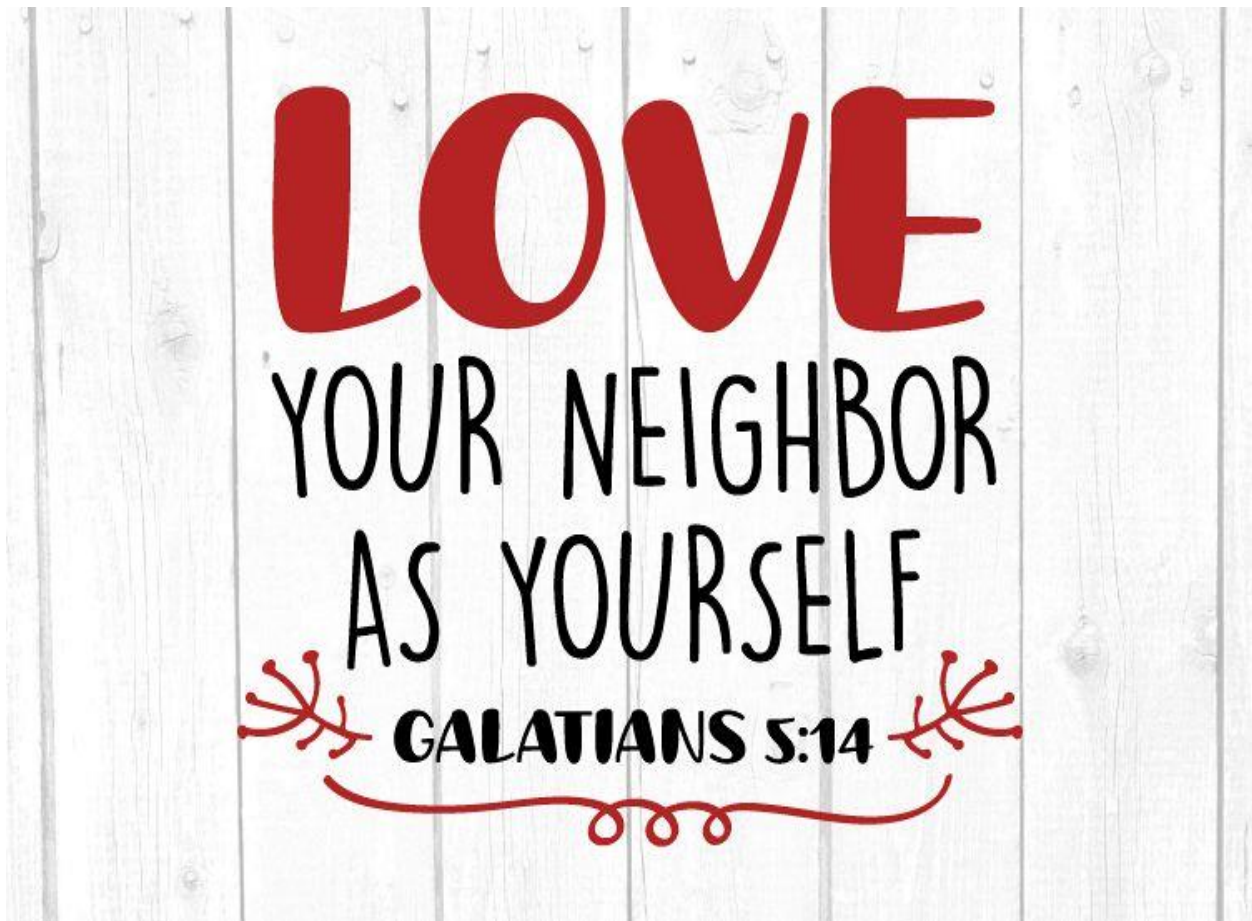
We still wrestle with the same problems that preoccupied Plato and Aristotle centuries ago: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? We search for answers, but the signs all seem to say “no exit.” But the Cross boldly stands against the confusion of our world, a beacon of hope in the midst of darkness and doubt. In the Cross, Christ not only bridged the gap between God and us, but there we find the answers to life’s deepest questions. There we discover our true identity: forgiven sinners who now belong to God. There we discover our true destiny: a glorious eternity with God in Heaven. There we discover our true purpose: to love God and serve Him with all our might. Never underestimate what Christ did for us through the Cross. By it our salvation was won, and by it our lives—and our world—can be transformed. What difference does the Cross make in your life?



April 8 – Wednesday of Holy Week

All the law is fulfilled in one word; . . . love your neighbor as yourself. (GALATIANS 5:14)

Suppose I gave everything I had to charity. You probably would say I was a very good person—a fine Christian. But Paul said that unless I acted out of love, “I am nothing” (I Cor. 13:2). George Sweeting has said, “Life minus love equals nothing!” Do you have this kind of love—a love that puts others ahead of yourself? Without Jesus Christ in your heart, without the Holy Spirit in your life, you can’t produce this love. This is the kind of love Jesus had for us, when He willingly left the glory of Heaven and went to the cross for our salvation. Only God can give us a selfless love for others, as the Holy Spirit changes us from within. This is one reason we must receive Christ, for apart from His Spirit we can never be freed from the chains of selfishness, jealousy, and indifference. Will others see Christ’s love in your life today?



April 9 – Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17 -- Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.



April 10 – Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 -- The Suffering and Glory of the Servant

See, my servant will act wisely, he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

Just as there were many who were appalled at him his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression[d] and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

April 11 – Great Easter Vigil

Isaiah 55:1-11 -- Invitation to the Thirsty

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.” Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.



April 12 – Resurrection of the Lord – EASTER SUNDAY

John 20:1-18 -- The Empty Tomb

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

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.

