



CREATION TO THE CROSS EASTER 04.21.19

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

In John chapter five, Jesus is accused of Law-breaking. The Scribes and Pharisees begin to persecute Him, starting a public trial that lasts through chapter eight. They hope to kill Him. But Jesus defends Himself vigorously, and then He turns the tables on His accusers.

"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

The word translated "Scriptures" literally means *writings* and refers to what we would call the Old Testament. By appealing to the ancient Hebrew writings as a witness, Jesus does something remarkable. He gives us an interpretive key to understand this seemingly odd, and sometimes baffling, collection of stories and poetry. They are about Him.

This 21-day devotional is designed to do two things. First, to unite us in prayer and fasting as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection this Easter. Second, to help us see the divine preparation for His coming in the arc of God's salvific history. The entire story has one focal point, one purpose. It points people to Jesus.

Let us pray that our lives will do the same.

1:20-25 BIRDS AND FISH

"And God said, "Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the sky." So God created the great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters teemed according to their kinds, and every bird of flight after its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, land crawlers, and wild animals according to their kinds." And it was so. God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that crawls upon the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good."

The separation of livestock, birds, and fish is a clue. God uses birds to provide in the Old Testament. During the Exodus, quail arrive and sustain the people of Israel. Ravens feed Elijah by the brook. Something changes after the arrival of Jesus though. God uses fish to provide for His people's physical needs. Jesus feeds the multitudes with just a handful of fish and a few loaves. Peter finds a coin in a fish's mouth to pay taxes owed to Caesar. Jesus calls His disciples from among fishermen, telling them to cast their nets "on the other side." This division between birds and fish brackets a third category: the livestock of the land. And livestock point to a spotless lamb, a redeeming sacrifice.

1 Consider the extraordinary sovereignty of God and how this tip of the hat shows us that He had a plan all along. Write a prayer giving thanks to God, for His provision. Also, intercede for someone you know who needs Jesus:

2:25 SACRIFICE AND SKINS

3:6-7
3:21

"Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."

Created to feel no shame, Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness after sinning. They tried sewing fig leaves together, but those would not do. Hebrews 9:22 says, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." A sacrifice is required to atone for sin, and God Himself provides it, making garments of skin for Adam and Eve. But this is only temporary. So, God provides the ultimate atoning sacrifice in Christ— "...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

14:18-20 MELCHIZEDEK

"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

This mysterious figure from an obscure passage in Genesis becomes points to a system built on faith and relationship. A system that would come into its fullness in Jesus. The savior, who the children of Israel were waiting for, did not come from a tribe of priests but from Judah, a tribe of warriors. Yet, He was not a warrior in the way the people of His day expected but rather was the promised priest who would bring them into a relationship with God that was far closer than they could have imagined— not by way of ancestral lineage but rather through faith. Let us read the words below from Hebrews and consider our access to God and the unexpected and powerful ways we might encounter Him.

Hebrews 7:16-19 ...one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to His ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

3 Record your thoughts about God granting you access to Himself in Christ. Think about what it means to you that Jesus, as the perfect Priest, offered the perfect sacrifice which gave you entrance into God's family. Pray for those who need to see His sacrifice as the supreme declaration of God's love.

22:9-12 KILLING HIS SON

"When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Abraham had advanced to old age before receiving the son he was promised years beforehand. Isaac represented Abraham's great hope, his family name being passed on and his lineage continuing. Yet God asked Abraham to sacrifice that which was most precious to him – his only son. While God provides a ram caught in the thicket so that Isaac's life is spared, He does not spare His own Son's life. Jesus, like Isaac, was an only son born of divine intervention. He also carried wood to the same mountain, and was bound there. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us that Abraham had great faith all along. He believed that even if God called him to slay his son, that same God would bring Isaac back to life and fulfill His promise to make of Abraham a great nation.

4 Imagine sacrificing something extremely precious to you, then spend some time in prayer thanking God for His willingness to sacrifice His only Son. Also, pray for those who hold on to things they believe are precious but who have never laid hold of Jesus. Journal your thoughts after praying:

3:20-22 THE FLOOD

"...to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him."

Out with the old and in with the new life! What a powerful reminder the story of Noah and his Ark are – that God makes a way of salvation in the midst of brokenness and darkness run wild. The Ark is a model of our spiritual renewal in baptism, life from the inside bursting forth like those saved within the Ark. With it comes the washing and renewal of the water, like the great reset and rebirth accomplished by the flood. The rebirth of new life symbolizes our own regeneration by the Spirit as we are united to Jesus by faith in His death and Resurrection. The public sacrament of water baptism is an outward declaration of that inward change.

5 Take time today to reflect and give thanks for the new life we have in Christ. Write a prayer of thanks for your own water baptism and what it symbolizes. If you've never been baptized, consider doing so at Easter and pray for those who will follow Jesus into the waters of baptism this Easter.

37:25-28 SOLD INTO SLAVERY

"As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt."

Egypt represents bondage and suffering, a place where God will demonstrate His sovereign commitment to save and provide for the people He loves. As the story unfolds, Joseph rises from slavery to become chief under Pharaoh, ruling Egypt and saving the children of Israel. This includes his brothers, the very ones that sold him into bondage.

Shortly after His birth, Jesus fled with His family to Egypt in order to escape King Herod. (Matthew 2:13-15) How extraordinary that the savior of humanity would go to Egypt under terrible circumstances only to return and bring about ultimate salvation, leading His people in the last Exodus. This is what the prophet Hosea spoke about in Hosea 11:1 when he said, "Out of Egypt I will call my Son..."

1:22; 2:1-3 SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENT

"Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile."

The book of Exodus offer a wonderful preview of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus. This story looks at the birth of Moses – a deliverer chosen by God – and parents who believed the Lord had a plan for the life of their son. It shows the evil of the Enemy and the foolishness of a Pharaoh's heart, who planned to murder the Hebrew baby boys.

King Herod tried the same thing during the time of Jesus. His aim was to cut off the future of the Hebrew people, eliminating all chance of a deliverer. We can hear the echoes of Moses' story as an evil king in league with the Enemy tries to destroy hope, freedom, and salvation for all humanity – including you.

12:5-7, PASSOVER 13-14, AND 46

"The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door frames of the houses where they eat the lambs... On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt... It (the lamb) must be eaten inside the house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones."

The night before Israel began their Exodus from Egypt, each Israelite family sacrificed an unblemished lamb or goat and spread its blood on the door frames of their homes. The Angel of Death passed over those homes, yet struck the homes of the Egyptians.

Jesus, the lamb without defect sacrificed for us, is foreshadowed in this story. 1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." John 19:36 reads, "These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of His bones will be broken,...' Just like the Passover lamb.

8 Reflect on Jesus as the spotless Lamb of God. Thank Him for resisting temptation and living a sinless life so that by His blood you could be redeemed. Record your thoughts and offer a prayer of thanks:

8:2 EXODUS

"Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them He was hungry." (Luke 4:1-2)

In many ways the life of Christ parallels the history of the Israelites. Israel wandered in the desert for forty years before crossing the Jordan River into the promised land. In a similar way, Jesus underwent forty days of testing in the desert, and then was baptized before beginning His earthly ministry. The Israelites' Exodus from Egypt moved them from a place of physical slavery to one of freedom. Jesus' "exodus" was about bringing people from slavery of the soul to a place of freedom in every sense, giving them spiritual, physical, mental, and social shalom.

9 Contemplate the profound freedom and peace that Jesus offers.

Look for areas in your life where you need to be released from some sort of bondage. Ask God to set you free from what is holding you captive, and celebrate the areas in which His life has freed you already:

21:4-9 LIFTED UP

"They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!' Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived."

The children of Israel are traveling through a barren and deadly place where poisonous snakes are killing the people as a result of their sin. The Lord tells Moses to lift up a symbol of God's hope and power. Those that looked to it, looked to the Lord and lived. The people are delivered from sin and death because they believe God's promise to them. We see the parallel in the gospel of John which declares: the Son of Man, Jesus, must be lifted up. (John 3:14) Let us lift up the name and truth of Jesus and what He accomplished on the Cross and in His Resurrection.

16:14–15 MANNA

"When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.'"

Manna literally means "What is it?" The Hebrew people refused to recognize this blessing as bread, and stubbornly called it manna, even after they had been explicitly told what it was. In doing so, they were refusing to acknowledge what Moses had revealed about the substance.

This foreshadowed the response that Jesus, the True Bread from Heaven (John 6), would have from His people. He was despised in the same manner as manna, especially in the nation's refusal to recognize Him as the promised Bread from Heaven. After Jesus proclaimed Himself to be this, John records that, "Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven' and they went on to say, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" (John 6:41-42). In other words, they refused to call Jesus what He had declared Himself to be and continued calling Him "What is it?"

17:1-7 LIVING WATER

"The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?" But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

When the Israelites complained that the Lord had brought them out of Egypt only to die of thirst, God provided water despite their grumbling. Centuries later, Jesus was at the Feast of Tabernacles commemorating Israel's years spent living in temporary homes as they wandered. John 7:37-39 says, "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive."

28:15-21 A PRIESTLY GARMENT

"You are also to make a breastpiece of judgment with the same workmanship as the ephod. Construct it with gold, with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and with finely spun linen. It must be square when folded over double, a span long and a span wide. And mount on it a setting of gemstones, four rows of stones: In the first row there shall be a ruby, a topaz, and an emerald; in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; in the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and in the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper.

Mount these stones in gold filigree settings. The twelve stones are to correspond to the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes."

What could seem like an antiquated and obscure passage is in fact a great clue that helps us grasp God's love for us. We hold a place of great affection in the heart of Jesus our Redeemer. The precious piece of jewelry described in the passage above was created for the high priest to wear when he went into The Most Holy Place to minister before the Lord. The item he wore reminded the priest of that which was most important to God. It was the priest's duty to care for and bear the weight of God's people, His children. This symbol shows us how precious we are to Christ, who is our high priest. He cares for us and bears our burdens, ever making intercession before the throne of God on our behalf.

9:1-3 ATONEMENT AND 6-7

"Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place,... the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for Himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance."

The Day of Atonement was the pinnacle of Israel's sacrificial system (See Leviticus 16). After describing the function of this day, Hebrews 9 tells us that Jesus is the superior high priest, the one to whom all past priests point. Jesus could identify with the people in His humanity, so He was able to offer a sacrifice on their behalf. However, unlike a priest in the Aaronic line, Jesus did not need to make an offering for Himself. He is not just the sinless high priest but the spotless lamb as well. So, Jesus' sacrifice need not be repeated and His priesthood is unending.

14 Journal your thanks to the Lord that His sacrifice was sufficient for all time, and that it is by His action, atonement for your sin is made once and for all. Pray that many would receive His forgiveness this Easter.

4:8-10 KINSMAN REDEEMER

*"So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself."
And he removed his sandal.*

*Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people,
"Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi
all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also
acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife,
in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property,
so that his name will not disappear from among his family
or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"*

In the story of Ruth, Boaz illustrates the "chesed" or loving kindness that Jesus has for His people. Boaz is Ruth's kinsman-redeemer. He sacrificially provides the necessary means for Naomi and Ruth to be redeemed from a life of poverty and to be restored to their community. Just as Boaz intervened on behalf of Ruth—who was a foreigner with no right to Israel's promises—the Father sacrificed His Son, providing the necessary means to restore Jew and Gentile alike from a life of spiritual poverty. Jesus is the ultimate kinsman redeemer, who goes to great lengths to redeem His bride – the Church.

15 Think about what it means for you to be redeemed. How has your life changed? How has Jesus restored you? After recording your answer below, pray that this same kind of a kinsman-redeemer restoration would happen for someone else this Easter.

3:14-17 CROSSING THE JORDAN

"So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground."

At the end of forty long years wandering the desert, God led Joshua and the Israelites across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. They did so while witnessing a miracle that assured them of God's Presence. Jesus entered those same waters at His baptism, He emerges and leads us not into a new physical space, but into the promised inheritance – eternal life in God's Kingdom, entering the joy of our Master's rest.

16:11-13 OBSCURITY

"Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here." And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah."

Between the time David was anointed and when he became king, at least fifteen years passed. Although he knew would become the next king of Israel, he spent years tending sheep, serving Saul, fighting battles, and writing Psalms before he ever sat on the throne. Jesus also spent the better part of His life in obscurity before He became a public figure. Luke 2 says that after Jesus stayed in the temple for three days at the age of twelve, He returned home with His parents and "was obedient to them," and that He "grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." It is not until the wedding at Cana, after approximately eighteen years in obscurity, that Jesus performs His first miracle.

9:2-13 THE KING'S TABLE

"Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him,...\"Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?\" Ziba answered the king, \"There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.\"...King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, \"Mephibosheth!...Don't be afraid,...for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan.\"...Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's steward, and said to him, \"I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.\" ...So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons...And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet."

In ancient Israel, disability made one a shameful social outcast. Such people were considered to be cursed by God. In addition, it would have been normal and accepted for a king to kill any remaining descendants of the prior dynasty who might lay claim to the throne. Instead, David honors Jonathan's sole heir, Mephibosheth, who was lame in both feet. This is a beautiful picture of Jesus, who extends to us – those who were once His enemies and estranged from God – an invitation to dine at His table.

18 Read Luke 14:15-24 and Revelation 19:6-9. Contemplate what it means to be invited to the feast and journal your thoughts below. Pray that many would accept their invitation to dine at the King's table.

4:2-6 ELIJAH AND MOSES

"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty. "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

"After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. (Matthew 17:1-3)"

God speaks about how to recognize the Savior of the World when prophet Malachi writes about the Law of Moses and the prophet Elijah. This comes to the fruition on the mount of transfiguration where we read about Moses and Elijah speaking to Jesus. A bright cloud then encases them, showing Jesus to be the fullness of the Law (Moses) and the fullness of the Prophets (Elijah). Peter breaks in, saying they must honor this. But God interrupts him, telling those with Jesus that the honor is already present by revealing His glory while Jesus fulfills this prophecy.

19 Let us look today on the fullness of Jesus, the justice of the Law, the wisdom of prophecy, and the sacrifice of the Son who saves us. Pray a prayer of gratitude and journal your response as you consider all that is fulfilled in Jesus.

2:19-20 A FAITHFUL HUSBAND

"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord."

"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God." (Revelation 21:1-3)

The prophet Hosea was a faithful husband married to an adulterous wife, yet he dealt tenderly with her, pursuing her in the midst of her sin. Just as Hosea's wife was unfaithful, so Israel was to God. Despite her unfaithfulness, God inspires Hosea to write, predicting that He will redeem His adulterous bride. In the New Testament, the church is called the bride of Christ. As Revelation 21:2 reads above, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." God is always true to His word, and our faith is not in our faithfulness, but in His.

20 Reflect on how you have seen God's grace in your life – the faults He has chosen to overlook, the sin He has washed away, the forgiveness He has extended—and give thanks. Pray for hearts full of thankfulness to be birthed in our church.

12:39-40 THE SIGN OF JONAH

"A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Jonah spent three days and nights interred in a huge fish, after which he was spit out onto dry ground. Jesus spent three days and nights interred in the heart of the earth. Jonah was preserved for three days and miraculously delivered from his presumed grave. Jesus was also delivered from death on the third day and miraculously freed when the angel moved the stone. Coincidence? No. Jonah's life and ministry foreshadowed that of Jesus Christ. Consider his birth. Jonah was born in Galilee; in Gath-Hepher in the tribal territory of Zebulun. This town is very close to Nazareth, where Jesus was reared. One of the criticisms of Jesus during His ministry was that the Messiah could not possibly come from Galilee. The Jews of Judea were very prejudiced against their hillbilly brothers up in Galilee.

In fact, God had prophesied through Isaiah over seven centuries before; "In the past He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future He will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan". He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time and on forever." (Isaiah 9:1,7)

WHY FAST?

There are many benefits to fasting. Among them are an increased spiritual sensitivity, a heightened hunger for God, a focused intensity as you contend for God's best, seeing the bonds of stubborn sin broken, and experiencing a passion for evangelism. It's especially helpful when you have a major decision to make because it promises to make you more attuned to God's Spirit.

INSTRUCTIONS ON FASTING

Here are three kinds of fasts found in the Bible. Here's an example of each, and how to go about doing them:

The Partial Fast—like John the Baptist, who fasted from certain foods in favor of locusts and honey. (Matthew 3:4) You simply fast something selective, like a type of food.

The Normal Fast—The 40 days Jesus fasted, for example. No mention is made of whether He fasted from water, though it is possible. A normal fast is one where you eat no food and drink only water. Following the fast, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. (Mark 4:1–4, and Luke 4:14–15) Lots of people regularly fast for 1–3 days and find that it's not difficult for short periods of time if their health is good.

The Total Fast—like Moses on the Mountain of God. (Exodus 34:28) You don't eat or drink anything during this fast, including water. In Moses' case it may have been a sunup to sundown fast each day, or a supernatural occurrence because of its duration. Only do a total fast for a short time, maybe 8–12 hours, and only if your care provider confirms you're healthy enough to do so.

Jesus told His disciples to keep their fasts a matter between themselves and God. Apparently, it was not uncommon for those who were fasting to draw attention to themselves, seeking recognition from men. Jesus instructs His disciples not to do that, but to look their best while drawing no attention to their fast. (Matthew 6:16)

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

There are examples of fasting throughout the Bible, but let's look at some instances in the New Testament. Anna fasted and prayed at the temple and was able to discern the importance of Jesus when He was presented by Mary and Joseph. (Luke 2:36–38) In a parable about two men coming to pray, Jesus shows that ritual holiness, like prayer,

fasting and tithing, can become prideful exercises that give men a false sense of security in their relationship with God. (Luke 18:12) But, In the Book of Acts, fasting was used as a means of receiving direction from the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:1-3) It's also recorded that prayer and fasting are part of the way Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for the churches that they planted. (Acts 14:23)

Fasting should not become a means of fulfilling a vow to God or of drawing attention to yourself. This does not honor God. A fast should be done with a proper heart toward God. Fasting is a sacrifice to God where you give up food, or something else, in order to devote your energy to prayer. A practical approach If you have a medical condition that could make it unsafe to stop eating for an extended time, is to check with your health-care provider before fasting. You can fast food and drink as mentioned above, or if your health doesn't allow for that, you can abstain from something else like social media. Other options might include television, ESPN, or video games.

Here's how to fast in three easy steps:

1. Decide what to fast, or what you're abstaining from, and record it here.
2. Commit to a length of time for your fast. Write it down here.
3. Use the time you gain from fasting to be with God in prayer.

I've decided to fast:

for: days.



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