

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR THE MONTH OF JULY 2026

July 5

The Believing centurion
Printed Text: Matthew 8:5-13
Devotional Reading: Acts 10:19-22, 30-35
Background Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
Key Text: Matthew 5:10

July 12

Simon Peter, the Restored Disciple
Printed Text: Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34; John 18:25-27; 21:15-17
Devotional Reading: Isaiah 40:26-31
Background Scripture: Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:7-38
Key Text: John 21:17

July 19

Zacchaeus, the Repentant Tax collector
Printed Text: Luke 19:1-10
Devotional Reading: Luke 6:31-38
Background Scripture: Luke 19:1-10
Key Text: Luke 19:5

July 26

Mary, the Loyal Mother
Printed Text: Luke 2:15-19; John 2:1-5; 19:25-27
Devotional Reading: Revelation 12:1-6
Background Scripture: Luke 1:26-56; 2:15-19; John 2:1-5; 19:25-27
Key Text: Luke 2:19

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 5 July 2026 09:00 AM EST

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The Believing centurion
Printed Text: Matthew 8:5-13
Devotional Reading: Acts 10:19-22, 30-35
Background Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
Key Text: Matthew 8:10

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: A Light to the Nations - Isaiah 49: 1-6
Tuesday: A Deliverer Will Come - Psalm 72:1-13
Wednesday: Saved By Grace - Ephesians 2:1-10
Thursday: No Longer Strangers – Ephesians 2:11-22
Friday: Nations Come to God's Light - Isaiah 60:1-7
Saturday: Nations Bow to Zion - Isaiah 60:8-14
Sunday: A Banquet Spread for All - Matthew 8:5-13

AIM for Change

EXPLAIN why the centurion's "great faith" is astonishing.

EXPLORE ways to practice intercessory prayer and

APPEAL to Jesus as an act of faith in God's power.

Keep in Mind

"When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith." (Matthew 8:10, ESV).

Background:

The previous chapter concluded the Sermon on the Mount. It has been acknowledged by all that there has been no higher ethic than that in the Sermon on the Mount.

Now the question arises: How can one attain that high ethic? To answer this question, Matthew brings together a series of miracles which demonstrate that the One who gave the ethic also has the dynamic for its accomplishment. Our Lord made it very clear to us who are believers that ". . . without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). You and I, in and of ourselves, are unable to produce anything which is acceptable to God. Christ today works through the Holy Spirit, whom He sent into the world, to accomplish through us what we cannot do.

This reveals an important point: Matthew is not attempting to give us a biography of the Lord Jesus, nor is he attempting to put in chronological order the series of events that took place in His ministry. Rather, he is giving us a movement, which we must not miss. The King went to the mountain, enunciated His manifesto, the law of the Kingdom; now He comes down from the mount, and we see twelve miracles that He performs. This demonstrates that when He rules on this earth, He will have the

dynamic to enforce the laws of His Kingdom.

Lesson Commentary:

A Centurion's Servant Healed (Matthew 8:5-9, ESV)

⁵When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him,

⁶"Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."

⁷And he said to him, "I will come and heal him."

⁸But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed."

⁹For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Capernaum was a significant town located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It served as a central hub for Jesus' ministry in Galilee. A centurion was a Roman officer in charge of approximately one hundred soldiers. This position was one of authority and respect within the Roman military structure. The presence of a centurion in Capernaum highlights the Roman occupation of Judea and Galilee during this period. The centurion's approach to Jesus demonstrates humility and recognition of Jesus' authority, which is notable given the typical Roman view of Jewish teachers.

The act of pleading indicates a sense of urgency and desperation. This centurion, despite his high status, humbles himself before Jesus, acknowledging His power and authority. This is a significant cultural moment, as Roman officials typically did not seek help from Jewish teachers. The centurion's faith and understanding of authority are later commended by Jesus (Matthew 8:10), illustrating a theme of faith transcending ethnic and cultural boundaries.

The centurion's faith transcends cultural and religious boundaries, demonstrating that true faith is recognized by God regardless of one's background. The centurion acknowledges Jesus' authority, understanding that His word alone is sufficient to heal. This challenges us to trust in the power of Jesus' word in our lives. The centurion approaches Jesus with humility, despite his own authority. This teaches us the importance of humility when coming before God. The centurion pleads on behalf of his servant, showing the importance of interceding for others in prayer. The centurion's concern for his servant shows a model of leadership that values and cares for those under one's authority. As Christians, we are called to lead with compassion and empathy.

The centurion, a Roman officer, was a Gentile, which underscores the inclusiveness of Jesus' ministry. This willingness to heal a servant of a Gentile reflects the breaking of cultural and religious barriers, as Jews typically avoided interactions with Gentiles. Jesus' readiness to go signifies His mission to bring healing and salvation to all, foreshadowing the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) where the disciples are instructed to make disciples of all nations.

Jesus' response is immediate and authoritative, showcasing His divine nature and power. His reply is not just a verbal agreement but an assurance of His ability to heal. This reflects the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah who would bring healing and restoration (Isaiah 53:4-5). The centurion's faith in Jesus' word alone, without needing His physical presence, is a testament to the power of Jesus' spoken word, reminiscent of God's creative word in Genesis 1. This interaction also prefigures the faith required for salvation, emphasizing belief in Jesus' authority and power.

The centurion addresses Jesus as "Lord," a term of respect and recognition of authority. His declaration of unworthiness is notable, as Roman centurions were typically men of status and authority. This humility contrasts with the pride often associated with Roman officials and indicates a recognition of Jesus' divine authority and holiness.

Jewish customs of the time considered entering a Gentile's home as potentially defiling. The centurion's awareness of this cultural sensitivity shows his respect for Jewish customs and his understanding of the potential implications for Jesus. He believes that Jesus' spoken word alone is sufficient to heal, demonstrating an understanding of Jesus' divine power that surpasses even that of many Jews of the time.

The centurion's concern for his servant, a position often considered lowly, reveals his compassion and sense of responsibility. The healing of the servant without physical presence or touch by Jesus illustrates the power of Jesus' word and foreshadows the spiritual healing available to all who believe, regardless of physical proximity.

1. How does the centurion's understanding of authority influence his faith in Jesus, and how can this understanding impact our own faith journey?
2. In what ways does the centurion's approach to Jesus challenge our own attitudes when we come to God in prayer?

The Respected Man: A Gentile (Matthew 8:10-13, ESV)

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

¹¹I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

¹²while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

¹³And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Jesus' reaction of marveling is noteworthy because it is rare for Him to be described as amazed. This indicates the extraordinary nature of the centurion's faith. In the Gospels, Jesus is often the one who amazes others with His teachings and miracles, but here, the faith of a Gentile centurion amazes Him, underscoring the depth and sincerity of the centurion's belief.

This public declaration serves as a teaching moment, emphasizing the importance of faith. It also contrasts the centurion's faith with the often-lacking faith of the Jewish people, including His own disciples at times. Jesus' statement highlights the unexpected nature of the centurion's faith, especially since he is a Gentile. Israel, God's chosen people, had the Law and the Prophets, yet Jesus had not encountered such faith among them. This serves as a critique of the spiritual state of Israel and a reminder of the openness of God's kingdom to all who believe.

Just as Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith, we should strive to have a faith that is remarkable and noteworthy, one that stands out in a world often characterized by doubt. The centurion's faith was not passive; it prompted him to seek Jesus actively. Our faith should lead us to action, seeking Jesus in prayer and obedience.

The scope of the Gospel is universal, breaking the boundaries of ethnicity and geography. In biblical times, "east" and "west" were often used to denote the farthest reaches of the known world, indicating that God's kingdom is open to all.

The banquet is a metaphor for the Messianic feast, a common image in Jewish eschatology representing the joy and fellowship in God's kingdom. It signifies abundance, celebration, and the fulfillment of God's promises. This imagery is also seen in Isaiah 25:6 and Revelation 19:9, where the feast symbolizes the ultimate communion with God.

These patriarchs are central figures in Jewish history and faith, representing the covenantal promises of God. Their mention here underscores the continuity of God's plan from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It also affirms that Gentiles will share in the blessings promised to the descendants of Abraham, as seen in Galatians 3:29. The kingdom of heaven is a central theme in Jesus' teachings, representing the realm where God's will is perfectly done. It is both a present reality and a future hope, as seen in Matthew 6:10 and Revelation 21:1-4.

The Jewish people, who were the initial recipients of God's promises and covenants. Historically, the Jews were considered God's chosen people, as seen in passages like Exodus 19:5-6. However, Jesus often challenged the assumption that mere ethnic heritage guaranteed a place in God's kingdom, emphasizing faith and obedience instead (Matthew 3:9).

The "outer darkness" symbolizes separation from God's presence and blessings. In biblical times, darkness often represented chaos, judgment, and evil (Genesis 1:2, Exodus 10:21-23). In this statement, we find a place of exclusion and divine judgment, contrasting with the light and joy of God's kingdom (Revelation 21:23-25). Throughout the Gospels the gnashing of teeth has been used to describe the anguish and regret of those who face judgment (Matthew 13:42, 50; Luke 13:28). "Weeping" indicates sorrow and despair, while "gnashing of teeth" suggests anger and frustration. This underscores the seriousness of rejecting God's offer of salvation and the resulting eternal consequences.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. How does the inclusion of people from the east and west in Matthew 8:11 challenge our understanding of who belongs in the kingdom of heaven?
2. In what ways can we, as modern believers, demonstrate the kind of faith that the centurion showed?
3. How can we cultivate a deeper recognition of Jesus' authority in our daily lives, similar to the centurion's understanding?
4. In what ways can we demonstrate compassionate leadership in our own spheres of influence, following the centurion's example?
5. How does the inclusion of Gentiles, as seen in the account of the centurion, reflect the mission of the Church today?

Lessons to Live By

The centurion's faith is central to this narrative. His belief in Jesus' authority over illness, even from a distance, exemplifies true faith. The centurion's faith contrasts with the often skeptical or unbelieving attitudes of others, including some of Jesus' own disciples.

The immediate healing of the centurion's servant demonstrates Jesus' divine authority over sickness and His compassion for all people, regardless of social status or ethnicity. This miracle serves as a testament to Jesus' identity as the Messiah, fulfilling prophecies such as Isaiah 53:4-5, which speak of the Messiah bearing our infirmities. Spiritual heritage or background does not guarantee entry into God's kingdom. Faith in Jesus is essential.

Jesus speaks clearly about the consequences of unbelief. The imagery of "outer darkness" serves as a sobering reminder of eternal separation from God.

The kingdom of God is open to all who have faith, regardless of their background, as demonstrated by the centurion's faith. The warning to the "sons of the kingdom" underscores the urgency of responding to Jesus' message with genuine faith. As believers, we are encouraged to examine their own faith and ensure it is genuine, not relying solely on religious identity or tradition.

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9

Simon Peter, the Restored Disciple

Printed Text: Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34; John 18:25-27; 21:15-17

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 40:26-31

Background Scripture: Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:7-38

Key Text: John 21:17

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Peter: Bold Gospel Preacher - Acts 2:14-21

Tuesday: I Sought the LORD - Psalm 34:1-9

Wednesday: The LORD Delivers - Psalm 34:10-22

Thursday: Peter Misunderstands - Mark 8:27-33

Friday: God Will Strengthen and Help - Isaiah 41:8-13

Saturday: Peter Denies Jesus - Mark 14:55-72

Sunday: Jesus Restores Peter - John 21:15-19

Keep in Mind:

"He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:17, ESV).

Lesson Aim:

REVIEW the major events in Peter's life;

EXPLAIN how Peter's life demonstrates God's ability to use people in spite of their failings; and

IDENTIFY ways that personal shortcomings can become opportunities to depend on Christ.

Background:

Christ gave an account of the nature of his kingdom. Its nature is not worldly; it is a kingdom within men, set up in their hearts and consciences; its riches spiritual, its power spiritual, and its glory within. Its supports are not worldly; its weapons are spiritual; it doesn't need, nor does it use, force to maintain and advance it, it welcomes all kingdoms but that of sin and Satan. Its object and design are not worldly. When Christ said, I am the Truth, he said, in effect, I am a King. He conquers by the convincing evidence of truth; he rules by the commanding power of truth. The subjects of this kingdom are those that are of the truth.

Loving Jesus because He has graciously forgiven all your sins is the foundational motive for serving Him. Behind that statement are the two great commandments: to love God and to love others. If we love God because of His love and grace toward us, we will serve Him by loving others. So loving Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who gave Himself on the cross to rescue us from God's judgment, is the essential motive for serving Him.

Lesson Commentary:

Peter's Testimony to Christ (Mark 8:27-29, ESV)

²⁷And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

²⁸And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

²⁹And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."

Caesarea Philippi, is a place of diverse beliefs, it underscores the importance of confessing Jesus as Lord amidst competing worldviews. The journey to Caesarea Philippi symbolizes the journey of discipleship, where understanding and faith are deepened through questioning and reflection. As believers, we are encouraged to witness in a pluralistic society. This text challenges Christians to confidently declare their faith in Jesus, even in environments that may be hostile or indifferent to the Gospel. Most importantly in our Christian walk, recognizing who Jesus is, remains a foundational aspect of Christian faith. This text challenges believers to consider their personal understanding of Jesus. Just as Jesus asked His disciples, believers today

are invited to reflect on who they say Jesus is, both in their hearts and in their public witness.

1. In what ways can we apply the question "Who do people say I am?" to our own lives and witness today?
2. What challenges do we face in confessing Jesus as Lord in a pluralistic society, and how can we overcome them?

Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial (Luke 22:31-34, ESV)

³¹"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,
³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."
³³Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."
³⁴Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

The imagery of sifting wheat involves separating the grain from the chaff, a process that is vigorous and thorough. This metaphor indicates a severe trial or testing. The phrase "all of you" suggests that while Peter is addressed directly, the testing is intended for all the disciples. Believers must recognize that spiritual opposition is real and persistent. Satan seeks to undermine faith and devotion to God. Just as Jesus warned Peter, we must be vigilant and prayerful, aware of the spiritual battles we face.

Trials, though challenging, are opportunities for growth and strengthening of faith. God can use them to refine and purify our devotion. Jesus' warning to Peter is coupled with His intercession. Believers can take comfort in knowing that Jesus intercedes for us in our trials. After overcoming trials, believers are called to support and strengthen others in their faith journey, as Peter was instructed to do.

Despite our best intentions, we are all susceptible to failure and sin. Peter's denial serves as a reminder of our need for humility and reliance on God's strength. Jesus' prediction underscores the need for spiritual vigilance. We must be aware of our surroundings and the pressures that can lead us to compromise our faith. Peter's account does not end with his denial. Jesus' later restoration of Peter assures us that failure is not final, and God's grace is sufficient for our redemption. Jesus' foretelling of Peter's denial demonstrates the reliability of His words and the fulfillment of prophecy, encouraging us to trust in the truth of Scripture. In moments of trial, we are called to stand firm in our faith, drawing strength from the Holy Spirit to boldly proclaim our allegiance to Christ.

1. How does Peter's denial reflect the challenges we face in standing firm in our faith today?
2. In what ways can we prepare ourselves spiritually to avoid falling into the same trap of denial or disowning our faith?

3. How does Peter's experience of denial and restoration encourage us in our own failures and subsequent growth in faith?

Peter Denies Jesus Again (John 18:25-27, ESV)

²⁵Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not."

²⁶One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"

²⁷Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

Peter's presence in the courtyard of the high priest is significant. He is physically close to Jesus, yet spiritually distant at this moment. The act of warming himself by the fire symbolizes his attempt to find comfort in a hostile environment. This setting is reminiscent of Psalm 1:1, where the righteous are warned against standing in the way of sinners. The courtyard is a place of trial and judgment, and Peter's actions here contrast with his earlier boldness in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10).

Peter's denial is a pivotal moment, highlighting human weakness and fear. Despite his earlier declarations of loyalty (John 13:37), Peter succumbs to pressure. This denial is the second of three, emphasizing the completeness of his failure. It serves as a reminder of the need for divine strength in the face of trials. Peter's denial contrasts with Jesus' steadfastness during His own interrogation. This moment also foreshadows Peter's eventual restoration and leadership in the early church, as seen in John 21:15-19, demonstrating the theme of redemption and forgiveness.

1. In what ways can we prepare ourselves spiritually to avoid falling into denial or sin when under pressure?
2. How does the account of Peter's denial and subsequent restoration encourage us in our own walk with Christ?
3. What role does community play in helping us remain faithful, and how can we support one another in times of trial?

Jesus's Discourse with Peter (John 21:15-17, ESV)

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Jesus' questioning of Peter serves as a moment of restoration, showing that past failures do not disqualify us from future service. Love is the Foundation of Service. The repeated question "Do you love Me?" emphasizes that genuine love for Christ is the foundation for any ministry or service. Jesus' command to "feed My sheep" highlights the importance of spiritual leadership and care within the Christian community. Peter's acknowledgment that Jesus knows all things reminds us of Christ's divine knowledge and understanding of our hearts. Peter's hurt at being asked a third time shows the importance of emotional honesty in our relationship with Christ.

Thoughts to Ponder:

1. How does Peter's response to Jesus' questioning in John 21:17 demonstrate his growth since his denial of Christ?
2. In what ways can we apply the principle of restoration seen in this passage to our own lives or to those we mentor?
3. How does the command to "feed My sheep" relate to the responsibilities of church leaders today?

Lesson to Live by:

Peter's denial highlights the frailty of human resolve and the need for reliance on God's strength. Despite our best intentions, we can falter, but God knows our hearts and our future. Denying Christ can lead to deep personal anguish, as seen in Peter's bitter weeping. However, genuine repentance opens the door to restoration and forgiveness. Peter's failure serves as a reminder of the need for spiritual vigilance and prayer, especially in times of trial. Jesus had urged His disciples to watch and pray to avoid falling into temptation. Jesus' accurate prediction of Peter's denial serves to strengthen our faith in His divine nature and the reliability of His words. Despite Peter's failure, Jesus restores and commissions him, demonstrating that our failures do not disqualify us from God's purposes when we repent and return to Him.

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9

Zacchaeus, the Repentant Tax collector

Printed Text: Luke 19:1-10

Devotional Reading: Luke 6:31-38

Background Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Key Text: Luke 19:5

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: God Calls for Restitution - Exodus 22: 1-6
Tuesday: Let the Oppressed Go Free - Isaiah 58:3-7
Wednesday: Blessings and Woes - Luke 6:20-26
Thursday: Love, Hospitality, and Contentment - Hebrews 13:1-6
Friday: Put Love Into Action - 1 John 3:14-18
Saturday: Commit Your Way to God - Psalm 37:1-5, 18-22
Sunday: Salvation for Zacchaeus - Luke 19:1-10

Keep in Mind:

"And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." (Luke 19:5, ESV).

Lesson Aim:

IDENTIFY how Zacchaeus and Jesus ignored social taboos;
REPENT of sinful attitudes we may have held toward certain people; and
CHALLENGE the stereotypes we have of others so we better share Christ with them.

Background:

Luke's Gospel was written to give another historical account of Jesus' life and ministry as the Son of God, this time emphasizing that Jesus brought salvation to the Jews and Gentiles. We see in Luke's writings what Jesus taught regarding love for neighbors; His inclusion of Gentiles in the definition of a neighbor; and concern for the weak, poor, marginalized, and outcast. The record of Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus is only found in Luke's Gospel.

The encounter with the tax collector is found soon after Jesus shares a parable with some of the religious elite in answer to those who look down on others. He compares and contrasts the prayer posture of a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). In this parable, the Pharisee is proud that he follows the Law and exalts himself in self-righteous prayer. In contrast the tax collector humbly comes before God in prayer asking for mercy. Jesus ends the parable by stressing that the one who is justified is the one who humbles himself in prayer (verse 14). We see Jesus' illustration brought to life in His meeting with Zacchaeus.

Lesson Commentary:

Counted Out (Luke 19:1-5, ESV)

¹He entered Jericho and was passing through.

²And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

³And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.

⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”

Jesus passes through Jericho, a notable, bustling city in biblical history with a mixed population of Jewish elitists and the unsavory. Here, Jesus healed a blind Bartimaeus who got His attention as He passed by despite the crowd's efforts to stop him (Mark 10:46-52). Luke adds a different dimension to the town of Jericho by highlighting Zacchaeus. He is chief tax collector and considered a traitor to his people and a puppet of their oppressor, the Roman government, which occupied Israel. Zacchaeus profits greatly from his position and is rich. He is also a short man, which probably is a second strike against him.

Ostracized by his people, Zacchaeus is on his own in trying to find a spot to see Jesus when he hears He is coming to town. Zacchaeus maneuvers through the crowd and climbs up a sycamore tree to capture a glimpse of Jesus as He passes by. It is in that moment that Jesus recognizes him because Jesus can read hearts and perceive when someone presses their way through a crowd to get to Him (Luke 8:43-48).

We should be encouraged that Zacchaeus' efforts pay off and Jesus spots him because when we seek Jesus with our heart, He will find us (Jeremiah 29:12-14). Of all the people in the crowd, of all the houses available to Him in Jericho, Jesus purposefully calls out Zacchaeus the short tax collector perched in the sycamore tree, and asks to dine at his house. This account shows us that no one is counted out.

1. In what ways can we be more open to recognizing and responding to Jesus' presence in our daily lives?

Call and Response (Luke 19:5-6, ESV)

⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”

⁶So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.

Does God know where we are any given moment? Can He reach us, even when others can't due to sin, irreconcilable differences, or distance? Will God notice our effort to change, as Jesus noticed Zacchaeus (and as the father did his son in the parable of the prodigal son, (Luke 15:11-32)? This passage answers each of these questions with

a resounding yes.

Rather than simply walk under the tree and continue His journey, Jesus looked up (Verse 5). His action was a divine call to a sinner, inviting Zacchaeus on a faith journey. In response, “Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to His house in great excitement and joy” (verse 6).

1. What are some practical ways the church as a body can demonstrate the joy of knowing Christ? Why is it important to do so?

Public Declarations (Luke 19:7-10, ESV)

⁷And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

⁸And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

⁹And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Zacchaeus quickly comes down from the tree. The surrounding people murmur about Jesus going to the home of this notorious sinner, but Zacchaeus receives Jesus into his home with joy. Jesus' act of inclusion, mercy, and grace compel Zacchaeus to make an astounding and heartfelt gesture. He submits to Jesus as Lord and pledges to give half of what he owns to the poor; and he will repay those he has extorted four times as much as he has taken. Only a true encounter with Jesus from a heart ready to receive Him can make such a declaration.

Compare Zacchaeus' response to that of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-23) whom Jesus tells to sell all he has, give it to the poor, and follow Him. The rich young ruler leaves sad because, although he follows the law and believes the Law, he is unable to trust Jesus to let go of all and follow Him. Zacchaeus, unprompted, volunteers from the heart to give what he has in response to the mercy received.

Zacchaeus repented of his sin and volunteered to make amends. His character and attitude contrast with those of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the parable Jesus told in Luke 18:9-14. The Pharisee's self-righteousness prevented him from seeing his need to get back on track spiritually. The tax collector humbled himself before God, admitting his faults, and was justified. Conversely, Zacchaeus' public declaration revealed his gratitude for Jesus' intervention in his life and also his joy of salvation. These, in turn, provided a forum for Jesus to declare His own mission—to seek and save the lost (verse 10). As Christians, we showcase Jesus' mission by our joyous faith. Zacchaeus' money and works did not bring salvation to him or his household; he was called in because of his repentant and humbled heart.

Sin separates us from God. Knowing this, many people delay making a faith decision because they want to “clean up” their lives first, but this misunderstands the Scriptures. According to 1 John 4:19, “We love him, because he first loved us.” Because He loves us, we can pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit in me” (Psalm 51:10). We then can get back on track, publicly declaring our joyous faith (Romans 10:10).

1. How do Zacchaeus and Jesus ignore the social taboos? How does their boldness lead to a new life for Zacchaeus?

2. In what ways have people stereotyped you for being passionate about the Gospel of Jesus? Stereotyped you because of your career? How would that feel? Now, given that feeling, how can one move past social and cultural stereotypes to embrace people who are different from ourselves?

Lesson to Live by:

Jesus ignored taboos surrounding association with tax collectors. He was purposeful in reading Zacchaeus' heart from a sycamore tree; and from this look of mercy, salvation was given and received. What would happen in our culture if we moved beyond stereotypes and biases to truly see each other as God intended? Jesus saw Zacchaeus' heart and restored him as a son of Abraham. As the body of Christ, we are instruments in bringing restoration and healing to our broken world.

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 26 July 2026 09:00 AM EST

Meeting ID: 848-9423-0612

Pass Code: 669872

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Mary, the Loyal Mother

Printed Text: Luke 2:15-19; John 2:1-5; 19:25-27

Devotional Reading: Revelation 12:1-6

Background Scripture: Luke 1:26-56; 2:15-19; John 2:1-5; 19:25-27

Key Text: Luke 2:19

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Consequences of Sin - Genesis 3: 14-20

Tuesday: Spiritual Family - Mark 3:31-35; Luke 11:27-28

Wednesday: Meditating on God's Law - Psalm 119:97-104

Thursday: Mary: the Lord's Servant - Luke 1:26-38

Friday: Keepsakes and Treasures - Luke 2:15-19

Saturday: To Us a Child is Born - Isaiah 9:3-7
Sunday: Mary Points Others to Jesus - John 2:1-5

AIM for Change

RECOUNT the angel's announcements to the shepherds and the shepherds' responses;

EXPLORE issues of proclamations, promises, and commitment; and

DEMONSTRATE our commitment to God in acts of praise.

Keep in Mind:

"But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." (Luke 2:19).

Background:

Even though the Jews did not have to serve in the Roman army, they still had to pay taxes to the Roman government. Therefore, a census (registration) was taken to aid in the collection process. But a Sovereign God, who controls history, was and always is in control of His universe. This omnipotent (all-powerful) God had a plan to bring His one and only Son into the world to serve as: (1) Prophet, (2) the Suffering Priest, and (3) King of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, the decree from the Roman ruler, Augustus, went out to all the Jews in God's perfect timing. God used this announcement to work His plan to get Joseph and Mary to the place where Jesus was to be born. Thus, Emperor Augustus's decree fulfilled prophecy that Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

It was also in God's sovereign plan that He would continue to reveal His Son. God chose to first reveal Him to lowly shepherds working in the fields. Bible scholars tell us that these shepherds may have supplied the sacrificial lambs for the temple. These lambs were used to pay the Jews' sin penalty and grant them forgiveness of sin. However, now on the scene would be the Lamb without spot or blemish, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. He would die on a cruel Cross, rise from the dead in three days, and win victory over sin and death (eternal separation from a Holy God). He would pay all believers' sin-penalty in full.

Another Old Testament prophecy was also fulfilled. Whereas the Jews were looking for a Messiah to deliver them from Roman rule, God sent His Son to save them from their sins. God was and is building His own kingdom, which will consist of everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (John 3:16). As we study today's lesson, be challenged to see the hand of God in the birth of His Son and the salvation of humanity.

Lesson Commentary:

Heaven and Earth Rejoice Over the Messiah's Birth (Luke 2:15-19, ESV)

¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Another function of an angel is to praise God (Luke 2:13; also see Revelation 5). "Glory to God the highest," they sing, acknowledging God's holiness and greatness over all other created beings. They applaud God for all the goodness and joy that the fulfillment of the messianic promise will bring into the world (v. 14).

The shepherds patterned their behavior after the angels. First, they were obedient to the mission God set before them. They hurried off to Bethlehem to see what God had revealed to them (Luke 2:15-16) and found Mary, Joseph, and the infant Messiah in the humble setting of a stable. Then, by sharing and spreading the Good News, they became God's earthly messengers (vv. 17-18). Finally, once they completed their assignment, they, too, responded with praise and worship (v. 20). Verse 19 shows us how Mary responded to this wondrous, cosmos-changing event. She quietly reflected upon and treasured the rejoicing and celebration of her child's birth.

The Merry Occasion (John 2:1-2, ESV)

¹On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

²Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.

Cana of Galilee was located just south of Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The bridegroom may have been related to or maybe a close friend of Mary, Jesus' mother. The language of the passage suggests that Mary had some official function at the wedding, while Jesus and His disciples were invited guests. "Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding" (from John 2:1-2, NIV).

Weddings were major events in those days. In small villages, such as Cana, where the people worked hard without much time for recreation, weddings were even more special. The entire village may have participated in the celebration of the couple's

union. The actual wedding usually took place on a Wednesday if the bride was a virgin and on Thursday if she was a widow. The phrase “the third day” in verse 1 refers to the succession of incidents recorded in John 1:29 and 1:35.

The series of events began with a celebration at the home of the bride. The bridal party escorted the maiden from her parents’ home and then to the home prepared for her by her husband. As the wedding party made its way through the streets, neighbors and townspeople saluted the bride. Many people joined the entourage until it grew into a parade. When the procession arrived at the bride’s new home, the couple exchanged vows. Then the bride and groom were crowned with garlands and the legal marriage document was signed. After the prescribed washing of hands and prayers, the marriage supper began with the cups being filled.

Marriage is the very first institution established by God (Genesis 2:24). The Old Testament repeatedly portrays the intimate relationship between God and Israel as a marriage (see Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 3:14; Hosea 1:2 and 3:1). In the New Testament, Christ is often referred to as the bridegroom (Matthew 9:15; John 3:29). The apostle Paul portrays the relationship between Christ and His church as that of a husband and wife (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27). The gathering of Christ and His church in heaven at the end of the age is described as a “wedding supper” (Revelation 19:9, NIV). When we consider the high esteem God has for marriage, it is highly appropriate that Christ would inaugurate the messianic age with a sign at a wedding.

The Modest Obedience (John 2:3-5, ESV)

⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”

⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Jewish wedding celebrations often lasted an entire week. The bridegroom’s family had the sacred responsibility of providing food and beverages for all their guests for as long as the celebration lasted. But, in the midst of this celebration, the unthinkable happened. The wine ran out. This was a matter of grave concern. It would be considered an insult to all those present and cause the family to become socially marginalized. Mary realized the situation was desperate and immediately turned to Jesus for help. She said, “They have no more wine,” (John 2:3, NIV).

Mary’s urgent request that Jesus do something does not necessarily indicate she expected a miracle. Her husband, Joseph, who is not mentioned again after the temple incident (Luke 2:41-51), had probably been dead for a long time. Over the years, Mary had become accustomed to depending on her eldest son in emergencies, and this situation certainly qualified as an emergency. Mary’s absolute confidence in Jesus

implies that He had seldom--if ever-- disappointed her.

Our Lord's response to His mother seems flippant on the face of it, but Jesus is not being callous or disrespectful. The term "woman" (John 2:4) was one of endearment. Jesus used the same word when He lovingly entrusted His mother to John's care from the Cross: "Woman, behold thy son" (from John 19:26). It is probably better translated as "Dear woman" (from John 2:4, NIV). When the Lord inquires of His mother, "Why do you involve me?" (from John 2:4, NIV), it marks the turning point in His relationship with her and His family. From that moment on, the business of His Father would take precedence over the concerns of His mother (see Luke 2:49-51).

The phrase "my time has not yet come" (John 2:4, NIV) is an idea that will be repeated throughout John's narrative (John 4:21, 23; 5:25; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23). Jesus lived His earthly life according to a heavenly clock. His time on earth was always in His Father's hands. The "hour" Jesus refers to (John 2:4) is the final hour of His earthly ministry when He would be manifested as the Christ and share in the glory of God (John 17:1).

Mary may or may not have understood what Jesus meant by His response, but she trusted Him to do what was right. She understood that Jesus was much more than just her Son. He was the Son of God. So, the mother humbly submitted herself to the Son and instructed the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5, NIV).

Christ Condemned and Crucified (John 19:25-27, ESV)

²⁵but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

²⁷Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

This phrase highlights the presence of Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the crucifixion. Her presence fulfills the prophecy of Simeon in Luke 2:35, where he foretold that a sword would pierce her soul. This moment is a profound testament to her faith and devotion, as she witnesses the suffering of her son. The location, Golgotha, is outside the city walls of Jerusalem, a place of execution, emphasizing the shame and suffering Jesus endured.

Addressing Mary as "Woman" is not disrespectful but rather a term of endearment and respect in the cultural context of the time. Jesus' words signify a transfer of responsibility, entrusting the care of His mother to John. This act reflects the importance of familial duty and care within the Jewish tradition, as well as the broader

Christian principle of community and support. It also symbolizes the formation of a new spiritual family, united not by blood but by faith in Christ. This moment can be seen as a type of Jesus' provision and care for His followers, ensuring they are not left alone.

Jesus' concern for His mother amidst His own suffering teaches us to care for others even when we are in pain. Jesus' actions fulfill the commandment to honor one's parents, reminding us of the importance of family responsibilities. Jesus' words to Mary and John illustrate the creation of a new spiritual family, emphasizing the bonds within the body of Christ. John's presence at the crucifixion underscores the importance of being a witness to Christ's work and sharing that testimony with others. The events at the crucifixion fulfill Old Testament prophecies, reinforcing the reliability and divine inspiration of Scripture.

Thoughts to Ponder:

1. How does Jesus' care for His mother on the cross challenge our understanding of family responsibilities?
2. In what ways can we, like John, respond to Jesus' call to care for those in our spiritual family?
3. How does the concept of a spiritual family, as seen in this passage, influence our relationships within the church?
4. What can we learn from Jesus' example about balancing personal suffering with the needs of others?
5. How does this passage encourage us to trust in God's provision and faithfulness, even in difficult circumstances?

Lesson in Our Society:

Always celebrate God's faithfulness and generosity! Today, there are many who fail to recognize God's gifts to us because they are too busy complaining about things not going according to their plans. Instead of letting our frustrations blind us, we should respond like the shepherds when God provides gifts like love, faith, peace, hope, joy, or a promise fulfilled. Embrace the 4 *Ps*:

1. **P**actice obedience to God's leading and direction.
2. **P**lan for change or be prompt in your actions when possible.
3. **P**roclaim the Good News by sharing it with others.
4. **P**raise and worship God for everything.

Next Week's Lesson: August 2

Thomas, the Hesitant Believer

Printed Text: John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29, 21:1-2

Devotional Reading: Psalm 91:1-6
Background Scripture: John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2
Key Text: John 20:27

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