

RAMAH MONTHLY

*The Life
of Jesus*

*a monthly devotional
for Ramah Baptist Church*

October 2025
The Gospels Continued

INTRODUCTION

Saints,

Press on in your study of God's Word. You'll never regret one moment spent knowing Christ through the Scriptures. This month's readings bring us into the Gospels and the life of our Lord. Rather than working through one Gospel at a time, the plan moves us throughout all four while following a general chronological timeline.

The weekend devotionals are related to the Reformation. October is Church History month. May we learn from the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before us, defending and preserving the faith.

The Scripture text for Sunday's sermon is also included each weekend so that you can read and pray over the text in advance. You'll be amazed at how much more you get from the Lord's Day service when you prepare your heart in advance.

At the end of the booklet is this month's hymn we are continuing to learn together including an introduction from Pastor Laramie and a recording link to listen to the hymn. Again, you'll be amazed at how much more you'll grow in singing God's praise with just a short amount of preparation.

We pray this resource better equips you in knowing, loving, and serving our great God.




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FOR GOD FOR THE CHURCH FOR THE WORLD

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Monday, September 29

Read: John 5

The Apostle John clearly wrote with an evangelistic bent: he wanted people to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (20:30–31). He organized his gospel tract around three common components: things Jesus said, the things he did, and how people responded. The first half of John’s masterpiece is marked by seven signs or miracles that serve as evidence of Jesus’s identity as the Son of God, while the second half is dedicated to Holy Week. John 5 brings us to the third of the gospel’s seven signs, which features a healing at the Bethesda pool. Jesus demonstrates his sovereign knowledge when he knows the man’s situation without being told. He displays his supernatural power by commanding the man to walk and sin no more. He discloses his deity as the Son when persecuted by the Jews.

Nowhere in the Old Testament did God forbid doing good on the Sabbath. The Jews persecute Jesus not because he has broken God’s law but man’s law. They ignore the clear miracle that Jesus has performed! Who can do something like this? Only God! Instead of responding to Jesus in faith, they persecute him as a Sabbath-breaker. Jesus does not defend himself by explaining how he hasn’t really broken the Sabbath. Instead, his response discloses his deity as the Son of God. God the Father is busy at work every moment sustaining all things, yet he does not break the Sabbath. God “works” every day, including the Sabbath, by giving life, taking life, and causing the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Jesus says he is working on the Sabbath just as his Father works on the Sabbath, which is a claim to be God. The Jews understand he is “making himself equal with God” and seek to kill him.

Jesus is clearly teaching the foundation of what Christians have understood as the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus is fully God just as the Father is fully God. The Father and Son are both worthy of worship as God. The Father and Son are equal in works, power, and sovereignty, even though they exercise different functions. The Son has been sent on mission by the Father, and there are many witnesses to Jesus’s work. The Apostle mentions many witnesses throughout the book, but in this text he emphasizes the testimony of John the Baptist, Jesus’s own works, the Father, and the Scriptures all testify to the identity and the deity of Jesus. The Scriptures given through Moses pointed to Jesus. To believe God’s Word is to believe that Jesus is who he says. Dear reader, do you believe?

Following Jesus involves rejection. This should not come as a surprise to us, but it often does. Jesus never hid this in his teaching, but Jesus also demonstrated this in his earthly ministry. We see Jesus being rejected. We see him warning his disciples that they will be rejected. We are given a graphic illustration of what this rejection may look like in the death of John the Baptist. Following Jesus comes with a cost.

Jesus himself is rejected in his own hometown of Nazareth. Those gathered in the synagogue that Sabbath day did not deny his authoritative teaching. They did not deny his wisdom or his mighty works. The hometown crowd could not deny what he had done, so they focused on who he was. They recounted his humble vocation. They listed his ordinary family members. The people were offended. They stumbled over the identity of Jesus and rejected him. We know this rejection will only grow and intensify all the way to the cross, yet it's remarkable that those who knew Jesus best understood him least.

Like so many others, Herod Antipas was confused about the identity of Jesus. He wondered if Jesus was actually a resurrected John the Baptist. Mark explains this superstitious idea by telling of the death of John. The faithful prophet had preached God's standards for marriage to the unbelieving Herod. The adulterous Herodias especially took offense to John's message, while Herod himself was torn between fear and possible faith. He heard John gladly and was perplexed by him greatly. Ultimately, the king weakly gave in to his wife's schemes with his stepdaughter being used as a pawn in the whole demonic story. Amidst the sumptuous dishes of the feast, the head of John the Baptist was served to the king on a platter. The rejection of the prophet's message resulted in the death of the prophet.

Sandwiched between these two narratives, Mark tells us of when Jesus sent out the twelve disciples in pairs. They're going on a short-term mission trip, traveling light and trusting God's provisions. Jesus isn't laying out a missions manifesto in these short verses, but he is reminding us all of the cost of discipleship. Not everyone will receive you, as he plainly tells the twelve. Considering the greater context of the chapter, we realize that not only will some people not receive the message of the gospel, but some will reject the messengers as well. The rejection of John the Baptist resulted in death. Jesus was rejected to the point of death. The Bible promises that believers will also be rejected, possibly even to the point of death. Dear Christian, are you counting the cost of following Jesus?

Wednesday, October 1

Read: John 6:1–21; Psalms 129–130

Reading Scripture can be dangerous. We often believe we already know familiar texts and do not read them carefully. All four gospels narrate Jesus feeding the 5,000 while all but Luke tell of Jesus walking on the water. We tend to harmonize the texts to the point of neglecting the four distinct witnesses Scripture gives us. Let us ask why John has told us these familiar stories. What does he emphasize that the other gospels do not?

John connects the feeding of the 5,000 with the Passover feast, the second one he mentions. Crowds are following Jesus because they see the miracles he does for the sick. Even as Jesus tests Philip, John is clear that the Lord knows exactly what he will do. He is sovereign over this situation. Philip's answer focuses on the financial impossibility of feeding the crowd, but Andrew's weak faith notices there is some food available. Jesus takes control of the situation and instructs his banquet guests to sit down. Careful readers may notice the reference to much grass in verse 10 and think of the shepherd in Psalm 23 that leads his sheep to lie down in green pastures. Jesus is feeding a crowd of approximately 20,000 people based on the presence of 5,000 men. The presence of leftovers certainly means the absence of hunger. The Good Shepherd has provided a feast for the sheep without a shepherd. Yet, many clearly still do not believe in Jesus as the Christ. Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18 that a greater prophet would be raised up in the future, yet Jesus is more than a prophet. John wants us to see that the people seem to be focused on their full stomachs and only want to enthrone the king who fed them.

Jesus withdraws from this situation. He will not be forced into any position that is not in keeping with his Father's perfect will. The disciples would have welcomed a present earthly kingdom now just like the crowds. Jesus takes them from the height of popularity where they helped him serve the thousands and he sends them into the storm. John doesn't focus quite as vividly on the fierceness of the storm, and he doesn't mention Peter walking on the water to the Lord. John's simple account focuses on Jesus identifying himself. He says, "It is I," which could also be understood as, "I am." Just as God revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14 as, "I AM WHO I AM," Jesus here reveals himself as the great I AM. Jesus is God. The crowds do not see and believe. The disciples still do not truly see and believe. Do you?

Jesus was no megachurch pastor. Yes, Jesus knew how to draw a crowd, but he also knew how to drive a crowd away. The Lord preached this message in the Capernaum synagogue (6:59) and did not compromise the truth in order to keep his crowd. Jesus was willing to make his hearers uncomfortable, and he taught truth that still makes us uncomfortable today. Yet, taking Jesus at his word brings great comfort to those who believe.

Jesus called out the crowd for following him only to get earthly blessings. The Lord calls them to work instead for eternal food, which comes simply through belief. The people point back to Moses and his manna, but Jesus corrects their thinking. The Father gave them bread from heaven in the wilderness, and the Father still gives bread from heaven. The bread from heaven is Jesus himself. To the woman at the well Jesus identified himself as the living water, and to the listening disciples he declares, “I am the bread of life; He who comes to Me will never hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” We often treat belief in Christ as if it were merely assenting to or agreeing with a short list of facts about Jesus. Here Jesus himself treats belief as if it is hungering and thirsting after him. Those who truly believe in Jesus will hunger and thirst for him. We will live our lives as if we truly believe that life can only be found in him.

Jesus is not unwilling to give uncomfortable teaching and trusts the Father to bring salvation as he sees fit. The Son has come to do the Father’s will. The Son will save all the Father gives to the Son. The Son will raise them up on the last day. He will never cast out anyone whom the Father gives him. He’s willing to speak the truth plainly even to the grumbling crowd, because he knows ultimately that the Father must draw people to the Son. Jesus is willing to make us all even more uncomfortable by speaking of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Of course we know he does not mean a physical eating (nor is he referring to the Lord’s Supper), but the reason we know this is because the Spirit has given us life. Some so-called disciples weren’t ready to truly follow Jesus and walked away after hearing his hard words. Many churches today would see this as failure, but Christ sees this as faithful. However, Peter believes that Jesus’s words are true. The Christ truly does have the words of eternal life. To whom shall we go? May we hunger and thirst after him.

Friday, October 3

Read: Mark 8:27–38; Psalms 131–132

Life is full of questions, but some are more important than others. This text presses his disciples on the most important question anyone will ever ask: who is Jesus? The conversation begins by Jesus asking what others say about him. The answers given are not bad; they're just wrong. In a surprising moment of clarity, Peter gets the answer exactly right. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Anointed One promised by God. All of Mark's fast-paced gospel has been building to this question: Who is Jesus? Peter answers, "He's the Christ!" Now the gospel writer shifts his attention to the question, "What kind of Messiah will he be? What did Jesus come to do?"

Jesus states the matter plainly to the twelve. The Son of Man came to die. He will be a suffering Messiah, a rejected Anointed One. Jesus teaches that he will suffer many things, he will be rejected, he will be killed, and he will rise again. We suspect the disciples did not hear the part about resurrection. If they heard, they certainly did not comprehend. Peter is so shocked by Jesus's words that he actually begins to rebuke the one with all authority. Jesus will not allow Peter to keep this a private matter and he turns to all of the disciples and rebukes Peter. The quick-to-speak apostle is not thinking clearly. He does not have his mind set on the interests of God, but rather the interests of man. How often we fall into this same trap. We desire to bypass the cross and go straight to the crown. We desire to miss the suffering and immediately enjoy the glory. Jesus teaches us a different way.

The Lord calls many around him and begins to speak about discipleship. To follow Jesus requires denying self. We must follow Jesus by way of the cross. Before Jesus has even made plain that he would die the shameful death on the cross, he is telling his followers that they must die to self. To take up their cross is to invite the possibility, even likelihood, of death. We naturally wish to preserve our own lives, but the gospel is worth more than life itself. Jesus is worth more. Are the comforts of this life and the fleeting personal glory of this age really worth the cost of our souls? Jesus warns against being ashamed of him. What kind of Messiah is Jesus? The kind who will give us life and demand our lives. The question for you, o reader, is whether you believe Jesus is who he says. Do we really believe Jesus is worth it all? If we do, let us truly follow him.

Weekend Devotion: What Was the Protestant Reformation?

To understand the Reformation and its lasting influence, we have to imagine a very different world from our own. For one thing, the choices we enjoy in the twenty-first-century West were nonexistent. Life was controlled by financial constraints, geography, ignorance, and family ties. And then there was the church. The freedom to choose one's own church was unheard of because before the mid 1500s, the Roman Catholic Church was the dominant religious force. In fact, in many parts of the world, it was essentially illegal to be anything but Roman Catholic or to read anything that didn't agree with Roman Catholic teaching. Rome insisted that it alone could interpret and explain the Bible.

Over many centuries, the Roman Catholic Church also added teachings by way of tradition that weren't in the Bible. One example was their teaching on purgatory, a place where departed souls, even the devout, spent countless years being refined by fire from residual sin committed during their lives. However, living relatives and friends of the departed could buy indulgences, which purportedly reduced the time the person spent in purgatory. So, if your mother had just died and was suffering agony in purgatory, you could buy an early release for her by dropping some coins into a box (or so they promised). This placed enormous emotional pressure on families, most of whom were poor and couldn't afford indulgences. And of course, the whole idea was fictional.

These and other abuses were occurring throughout Europe until a German monk named Martin Luther dared to question the church's teaching and practice. He decided to stand up to the forces of Rome by calling the authorities out and challenging their right to ask for indulgences. He did this by nailing ninety-five arguments to the door of his local Castle Church in Wittenberg. We might say his posting went viral, and it produced a major backlash. But by then, the spark had been lit. To many of the common people, Luther was a hero who had articulated everything they wanted to say but felt they couldn't.

Luther's revolt extended beyond indulgences and paved the way for the creation of what we now know as the Protestant movement, which spread all over Europe. It was characterized by three important features that differed from Roman Catholicism.

1. There was a rediscovery of the Bible as the final authority by which God could be known.

Luther quickly set about translating the Bible into the ordinary German language. With the invention of the printing press, Bibles quickly became available for common people to read. Protestants not only encouraged the reading of Scripture in their own languages but also taught that Scripture was its own interpreter, without the need for the Roman Catholic Church to dictate what it meant.

Bible alone, to the glory of God alone.

2. *There was a rediscovery of what a simple faith meant.*

The Roman Catholic Church taught that the only hope after death was the shortest possible time in purgatory. This could be achieved only if you obeyed their practices as devoutly as possible. Martin Luther, who started off as a monk, became deeply troubled by his continuous attempts to win God's salvation by his own good works. But while reading the letter to the Romans, he was suddenly struck by the simplicity of the statement, "The just will live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). It dawned on him that, due to his sin, his salvation was never going to happen by keeping the church's laws or by his attempts to keep God's laws. Rather, God was offering forgiveness and peace as a gift to be received by faith alone in His Son who had died on the cross for his sins.

3. *The Reformation brought about a return to simple Communion.*

The Roman Catholic Church practiced the Mass, a ceremony in which the wafer was believed to be changed (or transubstantiated) into the body of Jesus. The Protestant movement rediscovered the simplicity of eating bread and drinking wine as pointing to the body and blood of Jesus. While there were varying views of how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper among Protestants, they all rejected the view that the bread and wine substantially become the body and blood of Christ.

In rejecting the additional trappings of the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformers were not suggesting a free-for-all. On the contrary, they believed that the church was the context in which God's Word was preached and people gathered for worship. But instead of church being a spectator event, in which ordinary people had to sit and watch priests and listen to choirs, they could now take part—by singing, listening to the Scriptures preached, and receiving the Lord's Supper. Now, the Bible was being understood because preachers were allowing it to speak for itself. The people who were terrified beforehand of the prospect of thousands of years in purgatory were introduced to the gospel, where they could find instant forgiveness and assured peace with God.

In many of our churches today, we enjoy the simplicity of biblical worship, a Christ-centered gospel, and uncomplicated sacraments. These precious and simple blessings we often take for granted were not always accessible. They are a consequence of the courage of men like Martin Luther who found the joy of forgiveness not in the church's impossible dictates, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, within the Bible alone, to the glory of God alone.¹

¹ Article written by Iver Martin found at Ligonier.org

This Sunday's Sermon: Matthew 21:23–46

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For most of Jesus's ministry his glory was concealed. In humility Jesus emptied himself by being made in the likeness of men, found in the appearance of man, even a slave. From the cradle to the cross, his glory was hidden from the human eye. On the high mountain of transfiguration, Jesus gave three disciples a glimpse of his glory. Jesus ascended the mountain with his inner circle, and his appearance changed before their eyes. Not only that but two others appeared with Jesus, two who seemed to come from nowhere. Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets or Scripture as a whole, are conversing with Jesus. What a mountaintop experience! Peter knows this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and he doesn't want it to end. He suggests that three tents be prepared on the mountain, one for each prophet which puts them all on equal ground. What a terrible idea, Peter. Jesus is greater than Moses! Jesus is greater than Elijah! Peter's idea is so bad that the Father himself shows up and speaks from the cloud, "Listen to Jesus!" The Law and the Prophets point to Jesus.

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain. It's good to be on the mountain with God, but there's a lost and dying world in the valley. Jesus and the three apostles immediately encounter great needs when they come down the mountain. A desperate father has come to Jesus's disciples seeking relief for his demon-possessed son. The disciples have previously been able to follow the example of their Lord, but this time they fail. They're unable to make a difference in this boy's situation. Jesus presses for the father's faith, and the man declares his weak but sincere faith—his desperate faith that Jesus alone can save his son. The disciples failed to demonstrate their faith in prayer and were unable to see the power of God on display. This didn't stop Jesus. He speaks and even the demons obey.

Too often we focus on the mountaintop experiences of the Christian life and seek to go from one spiritual mountain to the next. Peter was one of three humans who had this heavenly experience. It was a preview of all that will be true in the kingdom of heaven. How easy it would have been for Peter to live the rest of his spiritual life based on that one experience. Instead, Peter tells us to trust the more sure word. (2 Pet 1:16–21). The sufficient Scriptures are not myths but rather everything we need for life and godliness. We must reject the desire to live off the spiritual experiences of the past and instead trust the more sure word of God. We say we believe this. Lord, help our unbelief.

Tuesday, October 7

Read: Matthew 17:24–27; Luke 9:37–50

Peter still didn't understand Jesus. Yes, he made the true confession—Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Yes, Peter got a glimpse of the glory of Jesus on the mountain. No, Peter still does not fully understand Jesus. Tax collector Matthew uniquely tells us of Peter's confusion over the temple tax. When the government agents approached Peter and suggested that the Teacher was committing tax evasion, Peter rashly said that Jesus would pay. Knowing what had happened, Jesus reminded Peter that the royal family is not taxed for the support of the kingdom. Sons are exempt. Peter fails to see the implications of his earlier statement, that Jesus is the son of the living God. He fails to see how even the temple points to the Son; therefore, a temple tax should not be collected from Jesus. And yet, Jesus pays the tax. What a miraculous manner in which the Son of God condescends to our flesh and avoids unnecessary offense. Think of all the events that took place in order for Peter to obey the Lord's command. Someone lost a coin in the sea. This one fish that God ordained swallowed that coin. This one fish just so happens to be where Jesus tells Peter to go fishing at the exact time that Peter is there fishing. No one else has caught the fish before Peter arrives, but when Peter casts his hook he finds this one certain fish on his hook, and this one certain fish has one certain coin on it to pay the temple tax. Is Peter starting to get the picture? Sadly, no.

Luke explicitly tells us the disciples are still not understanding Jesus, but they were afraid to ask for clarification. Jesus keeps talking about being delivered into the hands of men, but what does that really mean? The disciples are too afraid to ask, but they're not afraid to argue. They're not afraid to hinder someone from working in Jesus's name simply because he's not wearing their team jersey. Jesus sees and knows. He knows what they are thinking. He sees how they treat one another. Once again Jesus calls his disciples to humility. They shouldn't be jockeying for position in the kingdom. They shouldn't be puffed up with pride. Neither should we. We are called to be humble followers of Christ. We are called to have the humility of a child. Children are not perfect. They are not sinless. They are not noble in every way. They are, however, dependent on their parents. We are to be humbly dependent on our heavenly Father. We follow the example of our Lord, who humbled himself, even to death on a cross.

Matthew 18 is one of Jesus's five extended sections of teaching in this Gospel. He explains what life in the community of faith—the church—must look like. We enter the kingdom in humility. We avoid sin in ourselves, and we avoid causing sin and temptation to sin in others. No one in the community will perfectly live out these principles, and Jesus gives us instructions on how to deal with sin in the community. He specifically tells us how to handle forgiveness in the church. What a sermon from the perfect preacher!

Using a child as an object lesson, Jesus teaches that entrance into the kingdom of heaven requires a humble conversion. We enter the kingdom entirely dependent on the grace of the king. We welcome others into the kingdom in the same manner, and we never put stumbling blocks in the way of fellow believers, fellow children in the kingdom. We do not treat this as a little matter, for indeed Jesus teaches that it is better to take big steps to deal with even the littlest sins. We must not put temptations in the path of other believers, because little stumbling blocks can cause big stumbles. Jesus calls us to deal radically with sin. Take serious precautions because sin is serious. Temptation is serious. Eternity hangs in the balance. It is worth the work of avoiding sin, and it is worth the work in pursuing lost sheep who have gone astray. If our Lord rejoices over finding a straying sheep, should not the community of Christ rejoice over a wandering sheep that returns to the fold? Should not Christ's church pursue wandering members with the love of the Father?

Jesus tells us how to pursue wandering, sinning brothers and sisters with clear instructions. Go and show. Pray they will listen. If they do, we have won back our brother, and in this we must rejoice. If they refuse to listen, we continue to follow Christ's instructions. He told us that the church must recognize on earth the realities of heaven, so if someone persists in unrepentant sin we must treat them in the same way we would other lost people. That is, we proclaim the gospel to them, but we do not treat them like brothers and sisters. We must take sin seriously in the community. We also must take forgiveness seriously in the community. We don't keep count, but we are eager to forgive provided that the offender will only repent. Our king, the Lord of the church, has forgiven us far more than we will ever forgive anyone else. Therefore, we must always be eager to extend that same forgiveness to anyone who will repent.

Thursday, October 9

Read: John 7:1–8:30

The Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) looms large in the background of John 7–9. It celebrated God's faithfulness to his people while they wandered in the wilderness after the exodus. The festival was celebrated by making temporary dwellings to live in for the week as well as certain water-drawing and lamp-lighting traditions, which provide context for Jesus's references to himself as the light of the world and being water worthy of drinking. Not everyone understands what Jesus is saying or doing. Even his own brothers fail to recognize him as Messiah. Many questions swirl around and about Jesus, and some even seek to kill him. Yet, Jesus continues to preach the truth.

Jesus listened to all the questions going around and corrected the poor understanding of many people. It seems that each day of the festival is filled with more debate, more questions, and more confusion. When some people try to offer an unbiblical answer concerning knowing the Christ's origin, Jesus exclaims that the people do know him and know who sent him. Jesus knows the Father because the Father sent the Son. He is on a mission. Like before, some want to seize and threaten Jesus. The shadow of death is already looming large in the story, Jesus will not be harmed one moment too early. His hour had not yet come. On the climax of the last day of the feast, Jesus uses the elements of the celebration as object lessons. Jesus proclaims that he is the true water that will quench the thirst of everyone and anyone who will come to him in faith. Anyone who walks in darkness can walk in the light of Christ because he is the light of the world. Many still do not believe. They question and taunt him. They judge Jesus wrongly. He hints at his future death, that he will one day be lifted up on the cross. Yet, now is not the time and no one can seize him any earlier than the Father allows. Many did not believe, but many did.

Your Bible likely makes some note concerning the historical accuracy of John 7:53–8:11. It is not found in the best and oldest Greek manuscripts, and when it is found in later manuscripts it's often in a variety of locations in John's Gospel. You will notice that moving from 7:52 to 8:12 keeps the narrative moving smoothly while the questioned text is an interruption to the story. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to treat the text as trustworthy, sacred Scripture, albeit misplaced at this point in John's Gospel. Rightly understood, the text is consistent with all of Scripture and should be interpreted as such.

As the Light of the World, Jesus is able to give sight to the blind. The healing of the man blind from birth answers and causes many questions, yet begins with a single question: Whose fault is this, Jesus? We often think in those same terms—if something bad happens in life, it must be because of a particular sin. The truth is that all suffering is a result of Adam's original sin in the garden; yet an individual person's suffering is not necessarily the result of their own personal sin (but it is possible). In this instance God's sovereign plan is the reason for this man's blindness, in order for the glory of God to be displayed in his life.

After Jesus vividly touches the blind man, he sends him away to wash. What should be a cause for rejoicing becomes the source of confusion and even willful blindness. The controversy over the formerly blind man answers many questions we may have about willful unbelief. We see people in the text creating unreasonable standards. They demand more and more evidence but never have enough. Even when their questions are answered, they refuse to believe the answer because they do not like the answer. In other words, their minds are made up no matter what the facts are. Like the man's parents, sometimes people are purposefully blind to Jesus because of the fear of man.

This man's testimony concerning the Christ is the same as ours: I know that I once was blind, but now I see. What amazing grace! The formerly blind man attempts to help them see the truth. His answer in verse 30 supposes that only God can give sight to the blind. If this man gave him sight, he must be from heaven. He must be God. Rather than listen to the man's logic, the willfully blind teachers close their minds to his argument. Their minds are made up. Facts are not needed.

The formerly blind man now has physical sight, but the Son of Man who is the Light of the World enlightens his spiritual eyes and gives him spiritual sight. Jesus reveals himself to this man in a saving way. After Jesus reveals himself to the man, he responds in belief. He who was blind to the gospel can now see Christ. His story is our story. We were blind, but Christ has caused us to see. The story of the willfully blind teachers is sadly the story of many we know and love. No amount of our evidence will be enough. We can answer every question, and they will still refuse to believe. Pray that the Light of the World will enlighten their eyes.

Weekend Devotion: Why Was the Reformation Necessary?

The church is always in need of reform. Even in the New Testament, we see Jesus rebuking Peter, and we see Paul correcting the Corinthians. Since Christians are always sinners, the church will always need reform. The question for us, however, is when does the need become an absolute necessity?

The great Reformers of the sixteenth century concluded that reform was urgent and necessary in their day. In pursuing reform for the church, they rejected two extremes. On the one hand, they rejected those who insisted that the church was essentially sound and needed no fundamental changes. On the other hand, they rejected those who believed that they could create a perfect church in every detail. The church needed fundamental reform, but it would also always need to be reforming itself. The Reformers reached these conclusions from their study of the Bible.

In 1543, the Reformer of Strasbourg, Martin Bucer, asked John Calvin to write a defense of the Reformation for presentation to Emperor Charles V at the imperial diet set to meet at Speyer in 1544. Bucer knew that the Roman Catholic emperor was surrounded by counselors who were maligning reform efforts in the church, and he believed that Calvin was the most capable minister to defend the Protestant cause.

Calvin rose to the challenge and wrote one of his best works, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church.” This substantial treatise did not convince the emperor, but it has come to be regarded by many as the best presentation of the Reformed cause ever written.

Calvin begins by observing that everyone agreed that the church had “diseases both numerous and grievous.” Calvin argues that matters were so serious that Christians could not abide a “longer delay” for reform or wait for “slow remedies.” He rejects the contention that the Reformers were guilty of “rash and impious innovation.” Rather, he insists that “God raised up Luther and others” to preserve “the truth of our religion.” Calvin saw that the foundations of Christianity were threatened and that only biblical truth would renew the church.

Calvin looks at four great areas in the life of the church that needed reform. These areas form what he calls the soul and the body of the church. The soul of the church is composed of the “pure and legitimate worship of God” and “the salvation of men.” The body of the church is composed of the “use of the sacraments” and “the government of the church.”

For Calvin, these matters were at the heart of the Reformation debates. They are essential to the life of the church and can only be rightly understood in light of the teaching

of the Scriptures.

We might be surprised that Calvin placed the worship of God as the first of the Reformation issues, but this was a consistent theme of his. Earlier, he had written to Cardinal Sadoletto: “There is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God.” Worship is where we meet with God, and that meeting must be conducted by God’s standards. Our worship shows whether we truly accept God’s Word as our authority and submit to it. Self-created worship is both a form of works-righteousness and an expression of idolatry.

Next, Calvin turned to what we often think of as the greatest issue of the Reformation, namely, the doctrine of justification:

We maintain, that of what description so ever any man’s works may be, he is regarded as righteous before God, simply on the footing of gratuitous mercy; because God, without any respect to works, freely adopts him in Christ, by imputing the righteousness of Christ to him, as if it were his own. This we call the righteousness of faith, viz., when a man, made void and empty of all confidence of works, feels convinced that the only ground of his acceptance with God is a righteousness which is wanting to himself, and is borrowed from Christ. The point on which the world always goes astray, (for this error has prevailed in almost every age,) is in imagining that man, however partially defective he may be, still in some degree merits the favor of God by works.

These foundational matters that form the soul of the church are supported by the body of the church: the sacraments and the government of the church. The sacraments must be restored to the pure and simple meaning and use given in the Bible. The government of the church must reject all tyranny that binds the consciences of Christians contrary to the Word of God.

As we look at the church in our day, we may well conclude that reformation is needed—indeed, is necessary—in many of the areas about which Calvin was so concerned. Only the Word and Spirit of God will ultimately reform the church. But we should pray and work faithfully that such reform will come in our time.¹

¹ Article written by Robert Godfrey found at Ligonier.org



This Sunday’s Sermon:
Matthew 22:1–14

Monday, October 13

Read: Luke 17:11–18:14

Jesus's kingdom is full of shocks and surprises. Luke illustrates this in a variety of ways. When Jesus heals ten lepers of their disease, only one comes back to thank him. That would strike most readers as an ungrateful attitude on the part of the nine. Who is this one man who has realized how great a mercy has been shown to him? It's a Samaritan. How shocking to the Jewish mind. As we learned in John 4, the Jews were deeply prejudiced against the Samaritans, and yet here's this unclean foreigner who is the model worshiper of God. He has saving faith when the rest do not. What a plot twist to the kingdom story.

Scoffing Pharisees ridicule the idea of Jesus as king of the kingdom, so they begin to ask for signs of the kingdom. Jesus quickly dismisses their ignorance but gives further explanation to his disciples. The day will come when followers of Christ will long to see his bodily presence of the King, but he will be gone for a season. After being rejected and crucified, he will be resurrected and ascended. The day will come when Christ will return, and when that day comes there will be no time to prepare. Like a flash of lightning across the sky, so sudden will be the King's return. So prepare now. Repent now. Enter the kingdom now at the invitation of the king.

Some parables leave the reader puzzled, but often the narrator explains. Jesus told a parable to show his followers that they should pray at all times and not lose heart. So when we read the parable of the unjust judge, we shouldn't assume that God is somehow unjust. We shouldn't understand Jesus to be teaching that we have to nag God in order to get an answer from him. Instead, we should pray at all times, and never lose heart. Will we be faithful and pray earnestly, even as we eagerly await our king's return?

The second parable is also about prayer, this time directed towards those who trust in themselves and their own righteousness. It was actually self-righteousness used to view others with contempt. How often are we like the Pharisee, thanking God we're not as bad as the next person? May we be more like the tax collector, who saw his need and humbly repented to God. He knew he needed God's mercy and desperately cried out in prayer. Jesus explains that the humbly repentant man was justified. As justified kingdom citizens, may we humbly, earnestly pray with hearts of gratitude for all that our King has done.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one of Jesus's best known and least understood parables. It arose from a real conversation; Jesus didn't make it up for no reason. A scholar of the law wants to justify himself, so he engages the Lord on the subject of eternal life. This question is not unique to this lawyer, and yet he answers it better than most in the gospels. Jesus points the man to the perfect law of God. God's Word will have God's answers. The scribe knows the right answer and summarizes the law correctly, but that's not enough. He wants affirmation from Jesus. He wants to justify himself. Like a good lawyer, he wants to show how well he can parse the law. His particular question, "Who is my neighbor?" gives rise to this parable.

The man's question was about the law, and his response came from the law. Rightly understood, God's law teaches in many places that God is a God of mercy who desires mercy more than sacrifice. The parable shows how easily someone can miss the heart of the law while keeping the letter. We look at the priest and Levite as unneighborly, calloused men who would not help someone in need. Perhaps there's truth in that assessment, but we must remember that priests and Levites served in the temple of God. They were not allowed to touch dead bodies or else they would be made ceremonially unclean and unable to do their jobs in the temple. This man appears to be dead, and so to help him would cause them to be unable to serve God. That's the law. How shocking for a Samaritan, not bound by God's law, to come and minister according to the true logic of the law. God's law should have moved the priest and the Levite to compassion, yet they did not love their neighbor rightly which meant they didn't love God rightly. This Samaritan modeled what it looked like to show mercy and to be a true neighbor as the law intended.

Even as the lawyer's question brought about the illustration of how to rightly love neighbor, Martha's distraction brought about the illustration from Mary of how to rightly love God. Mary chose the good portion. She worshiped Jesus above all else. Rightly understood, the law is pointing to Christ. We cannot truly love our neighbors rightly without loving Christ above all. We cannot truly love God rightly without loving Christ above all. Let us love our enemies. Let us love our neighbors. And let us love Christ above all.

Wednesday, October 15

Read: Luke 14; Psalm 135

The opening narrative in Luke 14 finds Jesus healing for the third time on the Sabbath in this gospel; yet, he clearly is being watched carefully. It seems like Jesus is being tested at the Pharisee's house, and this man with dropsy is a pawn in the Pharisees game. Our Lord uses the same impeccable logic he has used before, and it still cannot be defeated. However, this time after Jesus silences the critics, he begins to look around the table and he begins telling many parables that speak directly to various groups at the dinner.

Jesus speaks to those with the place of honor at the banquet, and calls them to humility. He next speaks directly to the man who invited him to the banquet with a parable of a banquet in the kingdom. Jesus has just modeled before this very host how to have compassion on the outcast, which is what Jesus tells the host he should do. Jesus is rebuking the rich and powerful Pharisees with these parables. He's not afraid to speak the truth to important, influential people and is not swayed by the opinions of man. Jesus's teaching certainly makes the banquet guests uncomfortable, so someone speaks up in an attempt to change the subject. To this man Jesus gives a third parable. In what seems unthinkable, all of the invited guests come up with an excuse to escape the banquet. So, the host must begin to invite those undesirable guests, like the man just healed from dropsy.

Jesus's trilogy of banquet parables is not communicating that the kingdom of heaven is only for the poor. No, Jesus also gives parables in the same chapter about a rich man building a tower and one about a powerful king. Disciples of the kingdom do not enter based on wealth or status. To follow Jesus we must carry our own cross. We must follow after him. We must love Jesus more than any relationship on earth. We must count the cost. The rich man considering building another tower counts the cost. The king considering going to war counts the cost. To follow Jesus requires that we count the cost. We must be salty disciples determined to be savory and not useless. Jesus's teaching goes against the grain of so much of modern Christianity. We have dumbed down the gospel to create an "easy-to-believe" version of Christianity that bears little resemblance to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Jesus has taught us to count the cost. When we do, we see that following Jesus is worth it! We used to be the spiritually crippled, lame, blind out in the highways and hedges, but Jesus has invited us to his banquet. Let us count the cost and follow him!

A lost sheep. A lost coin. A lost son. These familiar parables are told around the banquet table as the Pharisees continue to listen and grumble against Jesus. Tax collectors and sinners are coming closer to be able to hear Jesus's teaching, and this is all the Pharisees and scribes need to see to have something else to grumble about. As our Lord works the room offering customized parables cutting to the heart of the crowd's hearts, he turns his story-telling sights on them.

Perhaps the tax collector is intended as the recipient of the parable of the lost sheep. Tax collectors would understand the financial impact of losing even one sheep and would understand the great rejoicing over finding the lost sheep. Anyone listening should be able to hear the point, yet the Pharisees do not understand God's joy over a sinner who repents and enters the kingdom. God rejoices over saving the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but the Pharisees and scribes fail to even see that they are lost and do not understand such joy. The lost sheep has been found.

Everyone in the room could hear and understand the second parable, but perhaps it was particularly meaningful to a female sinner, even one like the prostitute at the banquet in Luke 7. Indeed Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, no matter their sinful past. Jesus assures the listening room that the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents. The lost coin has been found.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is often isolated and sometimes misinterpreted, but we see now that it can't be isolated from the context beginning in Chapter 14 and even the overall flow of Chapter 15. It would have general applicability to everyone at the banquet, but also particular significance for those grumbling over Jesus's eating and receiving sinners. The younger son's rebellion and foolishness pictures all of us in our lost condition. The shame and humiliation covers him as he begins to see what sin has cost him. He repents and returns home to a loving father with outstretched arms ready to receive him. Our heavenly Father sees our shame and humiliation and is ready to joyfully receive us through Christ if we will only repent. The older son looks a lot like the grumbling scribes and Pharisees around the table. The older brother could not rejoice over the salvation of the younger brother. The older brother served faithfully, and he wants recognition for it. The scribes and Pharisees want recognition for their supposed service to God. They cannot rejoice in the salvation of the tax collector and sinners. Yet God rejoices over any sinner who comes to him in faith. Lost sons have been found.

Friday, October 17

Read: Matthew 13:44–52, 25:1–46

Jesus offered many parables concerning his kingdom, each one intended to teach another truth. The kingdom is like a shining diamond, and each parable helps us to hold the kingdom up to the light and see more of its beauty. When we understand the kingdom truths of Scripture, we become like that head of the household who can bring out both old and new treasures. Depending on the occasion we can shine this or that light upon the Scriptures and see the glory of Christ and his kingdom. The kingdom nor entrance into it can be bought, yet it is worth absolutely everything. The laborer buying the field and the merchant buying the pearl of great value both illustrate the idea that the kingdom is worth everything. Life in Christ is worth everything. No matter you will give up in pursuing Christ, you have not lost anything. As we often sing, “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.”

Life in the kingdom brings eternal joy, but a life of rejecting the King will result in being separated from the righteous and being thrown into a fiery eternity where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus tells more about this future judgment in Matthew 24–25 as he speaks about the future. In Chapter 25 specifically, Jesus gives more parables of the kingdom. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus teaches that we are to be ready for the kingdom to come at any time. Everyone understood how a wedding worked in that day. Preparations would already be made, but the wedding could not begin until the groom arrived. For anyone who did not take the groom’s coming seriously, they would most certainly not be ready. Jesus teaches us to take seriously his promise of coming again and to be ready.

In the Parable of the Talents, a master is giving a great measure of wealth to a variety of servants. When the master returns, one wicked, lazy slave is not ready to give an account because he was afraid of the Master. Our view of God in heaven impacts how we live on earth. The slave thought his master to be harsh and exacting, so he did nothing with what had been entrusted to him. When we see God rightly, we can live rightly stewarding everything for the glory of God. He teaches us to be wise stewards of what God has given us. This includes using our gifts to help other brothers and sisters in need. Christ is coming. We must be ready. Christ is coming. We must live now in light of the eternal life we will enter then.

Weekend Devotion: Martin Luther: Here He Stood

One of the great rediscoveries of the Reformation — especially of Martin Luther — was that the word of God comes to us in the form of a book, the Bible. Luther grasped this powerful fact: God preserves the experience of salvation and holiness from generation to generation by means of a book of revelation, not a bishop in Rome.

The life-giving and life-threatening risk of the Reformation was the rejection of the pope and councils as the infallible, final authority of the church. Luther's adversary, Sylvester Prierias, wrote, "He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic" (Luther, 193). It followed that Luther would be excluded from the Roman Catholic Church. "What is new in Luther," Heiko Oberman says, "is the notion of absolute obedience to the Scriptures against any authorities; be they popes or councils" (Luther, 204).

This rediscovery of the word of God above all earthly powers shaped Luther and the entire Reformation. But Luther's path to that rediscovery was a tortuous one, beginning with a lightning storm at age 21.

Fearful Monk

On July 2, 1505, on the way home from law school, Luther was caught in a thunderstorm and was hurled to the ground by lightning. He cried out, "Help me, St. Anne! I will become a monk." Fifteen days later, to his father's dismay, Luther left his legal studies and kept his vow.

He knocked at the gate of the Augustinian hermits in Erfurt and asked the prior to accept him into the order. At 21, he became an Augustinian monk. At his first Mass two years later, Luther was so overwhelmed at the thought of God's majesty that he almost ran away. The prior persuaded him to continue.

But this incident of fear and trembling would not be an isolated one in Luther's life. Luther himself would later remember of these years, "Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction" (Selections, 12).

Luther would not be married for another twenty years — to Katharina von Bora on June 13, 1525 — which means he lived with sexual temptations as a single man till he was 42. But "in the monastery," he said, "I did not think about women, money, or possessions; instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow his grace on me." His all-consuming longing was to know the happiness of God's favor.

“If I could believe that God was not angry with me,” he said, “I would stand on my head for joy.”

Good News: God’s Righteousness

In 1509, Luther’s beloved superior and counselor and friend, Johannes von Staupitz, allowed Luther to begin teaching the Bible. Three years later, on October 19, 1512, at the age of 28, Luther received his doctor’s degree in theology, and von Staupitz turned over to him the chair in biblical theology at the University of Wittenberg, which Luther held the rest of his life.

As Luther set to work reading, studying, and teaching Scripture from the original languages, his troubled conscience seethed beneath the surface — especially as he confronted the phrase “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:16–17. To Luther, “the righteousness of God” could only mean one thing: God’s righteous punishment of sinners. The phrase was not “gospel” to him; it was a death sentence.

But then, in the work of a moment, all Luther’s hatred for the righteousness of God turned to love. He remembers,

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” . . . And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”

He concludes, “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”

Standing on the Book

Luther was not the pastor of the town church in Wittenberg, but he did share the preaching with his pastor friend, Johannes Bugenhagen. The record bears witness to how utterly devoted he was to the preaching of Scripture. For example, in 1522 he preached 117 sermons, the next year 137 sermons. In 1528, he preached almost 200 times, and from 1529 we have 121 sermons. So, the average in those four years was one sermon every two-and-a-half days.

Over the next 28 years, Luther would preach thousands of sermons, publish hundreds of pamphlets and books, endure scores of controversies, and counsel innumerable German citizens — all to spread the good news of God’s righteousness to a people trapped in a system of their own merit.

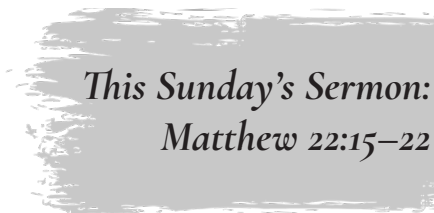
Through it all, Luther had one weapon with which to rescue this gospel from being sold in the markets of Wittenberg — Scripture. He drove out the moneychangers — the indulgence sellers — with the whip of the word of God, the Bible.

Luther said with resounding forcefulness in 1545, the year before he died, “Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture.” Here alone, in the pages of the Bible, God speaks with final authority. Here alone, decisive authority rests. From here alone, the gift of God’s righteousness comes to hell-bound sinners.

He lived what he urged. He wrote in 1533, “For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches, I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer” (What Luther Says, Vol. 1, 83). Oberman says Luther kept to that practice for at least ten years (Luther, 173). The Bible had come to mean more to Luther than all the fathers and commentators.

Here Luther stood, and here we stand. Not on the pronouncements of popes, or the decisions of councils, or the winds of popular opinion, but on “that word above all earthly powers” — the living and abiding word of God.¹

¹ Article written by John Piper found at DesiringGod.org as part of the Here We Stand series



*This Sunday's Sermon:
Matthew 22:15–22*

Monday, October 20

Read: Matthew 13:44–52, 25:1–46

Jesus told many stories throughout his ministry, often making clear when he was speaking to his audience in parables or figurative language. In Luke 16:19–31 Jesus tells a startling story that many believe to be a true story. He doesn't begin with the normal introduction of many parables. Jesus has just been giving non-figurative teaching in the text. There are proper names for characters, something that doesn't happen in parables. Whether a parable or a true story, Jesus certainly is correcting the Pharisees with this story, for we're told that the Pharisees were lovers of money (Lk 16:14). The rich man would appear to have the blessing of God on his life, at least when viewed through the eyes of the Pharisees. This Lazarus would seem to have the curse of God on his life. His eating table scraps, his open wounds, and his close association with dogs would have made Lazarus more unclean than the Pharisees could stand to hear. Certainly he must be cursed by God. All of this is reversed at death. The rich man sees that his riches can buy him no pleasure in death, for Hades is the place of the dead. Now moved with compassion that seemed lacking in life, the rich man pleads for the souls of his brothers. Abraham's words ring out: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." A different Lazarus does indeed rise from the dead, but the Pharisees are not convinced.

John 11 provides the powerful illustration of who Jesus is for all who will see. Jesus is sovereign, understanding the sickness and death of Lazarus from a divine perspective. Jesus is a loving friend who goes to comfort the mourning family. Jesus is compassionate as he is moved to tears in the face of his own grief and sorrow at the death of a close friend. Jesus patiently meets Mary and Martha in their individual responses to the death of their brother. Jesus teaches Martha as she questions God during her grief. Jesus comforts Mary as she weeps in her grief. Jesus is the authoritative resurrection and life for all who will believe. He is the one who can raise the dead! This isn't the first time Jesus has raised the dead, but surely it is the most public display of his power. Many Jews are there watching, and the Pharisees persist in their rejection. They plot to kill the Christ, the Son of God. They fail to see the glory of God on display in the resurrection of Lazarus. Will you believe like Martha or reject him like the Pharisees?

Read: Matthew 20:20–28; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 19:1–10

Often those closest to Jesus failed to see him the clearest. Jesus has repeatedly taught that his disciples must be marked by humility, but instead they are often busy arguing about who is greatest. James and John have heard Jesus teach about his kingdom and even the promise that the Twelve will reign with him (Matt 19:28). This prestige is not enough. The sons of Zebedee want even greater glory, and they're willing to use their own mother to get it. While we can commend Salome for believing that Christ will indeed be king over a coming kingdom, she must also be condemned for failing to see the kingdom clearly. Her sons foolishly think they can drink the cup of God's wrath that Jesus will endure on the cross, yet Jesus foretells that they will drink from the cup of rejection for following the king. James will die as the leader of the Jerusalem church while John will live a long life of faithfulness only to be exiled in old age. They will certainly one day reign with Christ but for now they must learn how to serve like Christ. Will they ever see the king clearly?

As Jesus travels the Jericho road to Jerusalem, he encounters a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Somewhere along the way, this beggar has learned of the Provider, the merciful Jesus. Bartimaeus correctly understands that Jesus is the Son of David, the promised King. He trusts that Jesus can do what no one else can: give him sight. Blind Bartimaeus clearly sees what the disciples failed to see.

Jesus taught that we must receive the kingdom of heaven like a child, dependent on the promises of the heavenly Father (Lk 18:17). He taught that those who are reliant on their wealth will find it impossible to enter the kingdom (Lk 18:24–27). As Jesus enters Jericho he encounters a child-sized rich man who will enter the kingdom. What is impossible with man is possible with God! The rich, young ruler had refused to give away his possessions which meant he failed the test to truly love God above all. Zaccheus, on the other hand, willingly and gladly makes restitution for the money he has stolen over these years. Salvation has come to the house of the rich tax collector. Anything is possible with God!

Jesus is really clear about his mission. Do you see it clearly? He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. He came to seek and to save the lost. With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Wednesday, October 22

Read: John 12:1–11; Matthew 21:1–11; Luke 19:39–40

The opening narrative in John 12 provides a startling contrast between two disciples—a devoted woman and a deceiving traitor. Mary brings a valuable fragrant oil that is worth around a year's wages and pours it out as an expression of love and adoration for Jesus. No price was too high for Mary to identify with her Redeemer in his suffering, for she was anointing him for his soon-coming death. Mary's act of worship was roundly condemned by those who supposedly knew who she was anointing. The same disciples who had confessed Jesus as the Christ were now condemning Mary for this extravagant expression. Judas, the same man who was jealous of the cost of the expensive fragrance, gladly betrays the Son of God for a far cheaper price. Judas has already made the devilish deal with the chief priests before gathering with the other disciples for the Passover. Judas had been intimately familiar with the Son of God, yet rejected him for his own personal gain. Reject the way of Judas; it only leads to death. Follow the example of Mary and her brother Lazarus. Jesus has raised us from spiritual death; let us pour out our lives in loving service to him.

As Jesus prepares to leave Bethany and enter Jerusalem, he makes clearly purposeful preparations. Our Lord's sovereignty is once again on display as he directs two disciples to just the right place at just the right time for just the right animal. His instructions to secure a donkey are no less than a fulfillment of an ancient prophecy from the prophet Zechariah. God through the prophet told the people to expect to see their king enter Jerusalem on a lowly beast of burden. Jesus no longer is keeping his identity a secret; it's as if he's waving a banner, "Here comes your king!" The crowds cry out "Hosanna," which means, "Save us, now." Even though the crowds are rejoicing in the coming of their king, we know that they do not truly understand their king. Jesus is the king they need, but not the king they desire. The crowds are looking for the Messiah King to overthrow the Romans now. They are looking for a solution to their earthly distress now. The people are looking for the mighty, powerful king to rule and reign now. They are not expecting a gentle king. A king who will save his people from their sins. A king who will rule and reign from the throne because he first conquered on the cross. The crowds were still perplexed about this man on the donkey, asking "Who is this man?" The Scriptures make the answer plain: He is King! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

As the cross comes nearer day by day, Jesus continues to confront the hypocrisy and empty religion of the Jewish people. The final week of conflict intensifies with the cleansing of the temple. Jesus had done this at the beginning of his ministry (Jn 2:14–16), and he does it again at the end. Our Lord cares that he is worshipped rightly according to what he has taught in the Scriptures. The cleansing of the temple shows how the religious leaders had corrupted the Scriptures and twisted worship into something God never intended it to be.

To better grasp the significance of the temple cleansing, we must consider the cursing of the fig tree. Mark sandwiches his account of Jesus driving out the merchants and money-changers from the temple between his account of Jesus cursing a fig tree that was not bearing fruit. Bearing leaves is a fig tree's way of announcing to you that it has figs. This fig tree was guilty of false advertising: its leaves indicated that there would also be fruit, but there was none. What was true of the tree was more true of the temple to a far greater degree. The temple of Jerusalem was to be a house of prayer for all nations. It should have been the place where people could go to get spiritual food but there was none. On the outside it had all the appearances of giving life, but the temple and its teachings would not actually support life. The cursing of the fig tree is an acted out parable of the curse of the temple. Even as the house of worship lacked prayer, Jesus gave his disciples a lesson about faith-filled prayer. Mountain-sized faith is not necessary. Mustard seed-sized faith will do.

Mark detailed five accounts of controversy in the beginning of Jesus's ministry, and now he begins to relay five more intensified accounts of controversy. The religious leaders are continuing to challenge the authority of Jesus. Our Lord answers their question with a question. If the religious elite deny that John the Baptist was a prophet of God, the crowds will have their heads because the common people truly believed that John was a prophet. If the religious leaders agree that John had been sent from heaven, then they open themselves to the obvious objection: "Why didn't you listen to him?" The cowards refuse to answer, so Jesus refuses to answer their question. This does not stop Jesus from answering them in a parable, though. While some parables were meant to conceal the truth, this parable is quite plain and the leaders know it. They continue to reject Christ, failing to see him as the true Cornerstone. You should not make the same mistake.

Friday, October 24

Read: Matthew 26:14–29; 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

It was all planned from the beginning. The cross. The betrayer. The details of the entry into Jerusalem. The details of this final Passover meal that becomes the Lord's Table. It's all part of God's perfect plan.

Sundown arrives and the celebration of the Passover meal begins. Having strongly desired to eat this meal with his disciples before his suffering began, Jesus leads the twelve in the ancient custom they've celebrated every year of their lives. Through this meal the Jewish people have remembered Yahweh's deliverance from death in Egypt for over a thousand years, but on this night Jesus changes the familiar language. The Bread of Life (Jn 6:35) takes bread, a usual part of the Passover meal, and speaks the unusual words: "Take eat; this is my body." Taking one of the cups, an ordinary element of the Passover meal, Jesus utters the extraordinary words, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured for many for forgiveness of sins." In one simple meal, Jesus unveils the feast of salvation.

Jesus is giving himself for us as our substitute. The Passover emphasized to generations of Israelites that God delivers his people through the death of an innocent substitute. This truth was pictured through the sacrifice of a spotless lamb, a ritual that continued year after year for generations because the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins. But Jesus now makes clear that he is the perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice given for us. (Heb 10). Centuries before this night, God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah that he would make a new covenant with his people and forgive their sins. Jesus will ratify this new covenant with his own blood the next day on the cross, for this is exactly what he came to do. It's all part of the plan.

Christ told his disciples that he would not enjoy this meal with them again until the feast of the Father's kingdom. However, Jesus did leave his church instructions to participate in this Lord's Supper until the Lord comes again. The Apostle Paul gave the earliest account of this meal in his letter to the Corinthians. He explained how the meal is a remembrance or a memorial of the substitutionary, saving work of Christ. He explained how the meal is a communion meal that pictures the communion or fellowship we have with Christ and that we have with one another because of Christ. Paul also explained that this meal at the Lord's Table is an evangelistic meal, for in obeying Christ's instructions we proclaim his death until he comes again. It's all part of the plan.

RAMAH MONTHLY

Weekend Devotion: John Knox: The Champion of the Kirk

In the early 1500s, Scotland had one thing in common with the rest of Europe: a deeply corrupt and spiritually impoverished church, with morally moribund leadership. To cite one notorious example, David Beaton, cardinal and archbishop, illegitimately fathered at least fourteen children as his own. So much for celibacy in action. The spiritual ignorance was such that George Buchanan could claim that some priests thought the New Testament was a book recently published by Martin Luther.

Enter John Knox, and the Reformation was underway.

Born in Haddington, East Lothian, sometime between 1513 and 1515, Knox received his schooling locally and then at the University of St. Andrews. He became a priest and returned to his home region as notary and tutor. We know as little about his conversion as we do about Calvin's.

Capture and Release

After the Protestant George Wishart's martyrdom in St. Andrews, Knox came to the town with some of his young students and, in 1547, joined the group of Reformers living in the castle there. When Knox was appointed to preach, he refused, but he was virtually manhandled into accepting a call from the castle congregation to become their minister. Within a matter of months, however, the castle was under siege from French ships in St. Andrews Bay. Knox and others were captured, and he became a galley slave for the next year and a half.

In 1549, Knox was released and made his way to England. He pastored a congregation at Berwick, but soon he moved to Newcastle. He then became a royal chaplain during the days of the young King Edward VI. The death of Edward in 1553 was a body blow to the reforming party in England, leading as it did to the enthronement of Mary Tudor ("that idolatrous Jezebel" were Knox's carefully chosen words to describe her). Knox sought refuge on the Continent.

Life on the Continent

Between 1553 and 1559, Knox lived a somewhat nomadic existence. He spent some time with Calvin in Geneva, calling it "the most perfect school of Christ . . . since the days of the apostles." Thereafter, he accepted a call to pastor the English-speaking congregation at Frankfurt am Main.

Knox married Englishwoman Marjorie Bowes and, in 1556, returned to Geneva, where he pastored a congregation of some two hundred refugees. The following year, he received an urgent invitation to come back to Scotland — 1558 was the scheduled time

for the marriage of the young Mary, Queen of Scots, to the dauphin of France, an event that seemed to destine Scotland for permanent Roman Catholic rule.

A taste of Knox's vigor can be savored in a letter he wrote that same year to the people of Scotland, urging them not to compromise the gospel. He reminded them that they must answer for their actions before the judgment seat of God:

[Some make excuses:] "We were but simple subjects, we would not redress the faults and crimes of our rulers, bishops, and clergy; we called for reformation, and wished for the same, but . . . we were compelled to give obedience to all that they demanded." These vain excuses, I say, will nothing avail you in the presence of God.

Return to Scotland

In 1559, Knox finally returned home to begin his most important phase of public ministry as the champion of the kirk (the Scottish term for church). Despite his lengthy absences from his native land, several things equipped Knox to lead the Reformation there: his name was associated with the heroes of the recent past, his sufferings authenticated his commitment, his broad experience had prepared him for leadership, and his sense of call made him "fear the face of no man." So, for the next thirteen years, Knox gave himself to the reformation of Scotland.

By the summer of 1572, Knox was a shadow of his former self, and by November, it was clear he was not long for this world. On the morning of November 24, he asked his second wife, Margaret, to read 1 Corinthians 15 to him, and around five o'clock came his final request: "Read where I cast my first anchor" (presumably in faith). She read John 17. By the end of the evening, he was gone.

Many explanations have been forthcoming for Knox's influence and that of the Scottish Reformation. No doubt there were many factors at work in the providence of God that brought about such spiritual renewal. But Knox's own conviction was this: "God gave His Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance." Therein lies the greatest lesson of his life.¹

¹ Article written by Sinclair Ferguson found at DesiringGod.org as part of the Here We Stand series

This Sunday's Sermon:
Matthew 22:23–33

Jesus will be denied. He will be betrayed. For the sake of the Scriptures, these things must be fulfilled. How does Jesus respond in the face of such treachery? He prays. Jesus is deeply grieved to the point of death, not at the prospect of the physical pain, but rather because the cup of God's wrath is about to be poured out on Him. He who never sinned is about to bear the weight of all of our sins. He who perfectly obeyed the Father in every way is about to bear the punishment for each of us who fully disobeyed the Father. As Jesus contemplates the quickly approaching reality of bearing your sin and mine, what does He do? He prays.

It is within the Father's ability to remove this cup from the Son. It is possible, but it is not the Father's will. For your sake and for mine, it was the Father's will to crush the Son (Isa 53:10). And so the Son prayed not once, not twice, but three times, "Not my will, but yours be done." If our Savior saw fit to pray during the hour of his greatest temptation, his greatest trial, ought we not to attend to the matter of prayer? No matter our temptations, no matter our trials, ought we learn from Christ to pray? Jesus left His closest disciples with the assignment of watchful prayer that they might not fall into temptation. Yet upon each successive return from prayer, Jesus finds the disciples not alert, not in prayer, but asleep. It's not that they didn't want to pray, but while their spirits were willing, their bodies were weak. Have you desired in your spirit to grow in prayer, yet your human flesh, plagued with weakness, seemed incapable of the discipline of prayer? Take courage, for our Savior is in prayer!

While Jesus was devoted in prayer, what was it that caused Him to pause three times? His concern for His disciples. Jesus, while "being in agony He was praying very fervently, and his sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground." (Lk 22:44). Yet He paused His prayer to check on His disciples. His compassion rested on them. His entire journey to the cross was for them—and us. That's our Savior. He is a sympathetic High Priest (Heb 4:15) who prayed for us in the Upper Room (John 17), prayed for us in the Garden of Gethsemane, and lives to pray for us even now (Heb 7:25). Oh, to pray like our Savior! Our flesh is certainly weak, but are our spirits even willing? Do we want to pray like our Lord prayed? Are we willing to yield to the will of the Father?

Tuesday, October 28

Read: John 18:12–27; Mark 14:53–65; Matthew 27:1–10

Those who have repeatedly opposed Jesus's ministry from the very beginning once again unite to see the Son of God silenced. The chief priests, the elders, the scribes—in short, the whole Sanhedrin are seeking false witnesses to testify against Christ. They are willing to beg, buy, or bully their way to just the right lies needed to put to death the Way, the Truth, and the Life. These pathetic perjurers can't even get their stories straight. The Jewish leaders egregiously broke their own rules in this mock trial in order to crucify the Lord of Glory. Rather than gathering in their normal meeting place, the Jews gathered at the home of Caiaphas, the high priest. Trials could only legally be held during the day, yet this illegal proceeding takes place at night. The witnesses at this trial did not agree, and safeguards put in place to protect defendants were ignored. Does Jesus wish to refute these false witnesses who are manipulating His words and assassinating His character? No. "Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter... so he did not open his mouth" (Isa 53:7). Now the high priest, acting as prosecutor, directly examines the witness: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" This is a Jewish way of avoiding using God's name directly, but the question could not be more clear. Are you claiming to be God? To this direct question, Jesus answers with the same name that God revealed to Moses: "I am" (Ex 3:14). At this, the prosecution rests. Could the verdict not be more clear? The jury unanimously agrees that Christ is deserving of death. Let the execution begin.

While the Judge of the Earth endures a mock trial, Peter himself is facing a trial of public opinion. Like so many professing Christians today, Peter attempts to follow at a distance. He doesn't want to be too closely associated with His Savior, lest that lead to the same fate. Peter's judge is not the high priest, but instead a servant girl who has no power and no authority. Yet her interrogation is intense. Three times she charges Peter with being a follower of Jesus and three times Peter denies it. Peter's guilt escalated as his professed connection to Christ dwindled. First, Peter didn't understand the question, then he denied being a disciple, until finally Peter denied even knowing Jesus. The same Jesus that Peter confessed as Savior, he now professes to be a stranger. Remembering Jesus's words, a rooster announces Peter's guilt. Both trials are over. Peter's verdict led to shame, then repentance, and ultimately restoration (see Jn 21:15–19). Jesus's verdict led to shame, death, and ultimately resurrection.

With their conviction complete, the Sanhedrin march Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate. While Jesus is guilty in their Jewish courtroom, he must stand before a Roman tribunal. Their desired outcome is the death penalty, but they cannot carry out this verdict. They must stir up the Gentile authorities to execute this Jewish teacher, so they begin vehemently accusing Jesus. They say he is one who misleads the people. They mislead Pilate, saying that Jesus forbade paying taxes to Caesar. These false charges describe a political revolutionary who is promoting rebellion and seeking to set himself up as an earthly king. These charges would certainly warrant legal action, if true. Pilate recognizes the insufficiency of their indictment and declares, “I find no guilt in this man.” What ought to have been the end of the story simply leads to the next scene, for the crowds grow more urgent in their demands, but they give Pilate a political out. Perhaps he can pass the buck to Herod who is governing Galilee but happens to be in Jerusalem at that time. Herod has long been curious about Jesus in the same way he was intrigued by John the Baptist before beheading him. Ultimately unsatisfied, Herod punts the political football back to Pilate, but a wicked friendship emerges. Two men who were opposed because of their desire for power are now united by their desire to oppose the one who truly has all power.

What is striking in this miscarriage of justice is how many times Jesus’s innocence is declared. Not once, not twice, but three times Pilate demands the crowd give a suitable reason for his death. Perhaps Pilate can appease the crowd by merely punishing Jesus and then releasing him. But the cries of the crowd are persistent: “Crucify him! Crucify him!” In the end, Pilate decides to grant their demand. He releases Barabbas and signs Jesus’s death warrant. He condemns an innocent man and sets the guilty one free. Our sense of justice might be angered when we watch this drama unfold, but isn’t this the story of the gospel? We sing “in my place condemned he stood.” We are guilty like Barabbas. We don’t deserve to go free. We deserve the death that the innocent Christ died in our place. The murderous rebel goes free while the innocent lamb of God is slain. This is exactly what Isaiah told us would happen.

*He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our peace fell upon Him,
And by His wounds we are healed.*

Isaiah 53:5

Thursday, October 30

Read: Matthew 27:27–61; Psalm 22

The time has come that the Scriptures will be fulfilled. Jesus will be crucified outside the city walls like a common criminal. He has been beaten and scourged into such a weakened state that he cannot physically carry his cross the rest of the way to the place of the Skull. A man named Simon passes by the wrong place at the wrong time and is conscripted by the soldiers to carry the cross for Jesus the rest of the journey. Here this stranger is literally taking up a cross and following Jesus; he seems to be the only true disciple in sight.

The physical suffering—the torture that Jesus endures—is what so often captures our attention. Psalm 22 even reads like a first hand account of that suffering. Yet, physical suffering is not where the Bible places the greatest emphasis. Yes, the crucifixion is more bloody, more cruel, more abhorrent than we can comprehend, and Christ endured it for us. This should certainly increase our affection for Christ, yet the gospel writers emphasize not the external suffering, but the internal. They tell us of the shame, the humiliation, the rejection that Christ endured. Those who passed by taunted Him, derided Him, and expressed their deepest contempt for Him. Even the two criminals experiencing the same crucifixion Jesus experienced reviled Him. The overwhelming weight of the wrath of God poured out on the Son led Christ to lament from the cross, using the language of Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” What our Savior endured is beyond our full comprehension.

Yet all was not rejection at Golgotha. The deep feeling of abandonment did not mean that Christ was truly abandoned by the Father on the cross. The Father received the sacrifice of the Son on our behalf. The curtain of the temple—symbolizing the barrier between God and man—was torn in two, from top to bottom. That’s something that only God could do! God accepted the work of Christ on our behalf! The crowds at the cross debated who Jesus truly was, but God proclaimed that Christ is who He said He is when the curtain was torn. The sinless son of God has offered up Himself for us, bringing all who trust His name to paradise with Him. The Roman soldier standing at the foot of the cross watching all of this unfold recognized the true identity of the man on the middle cross. “Truly, this man was the Son of God.” God has accepted the sacrifice of the Son. A Gentile has proclaimed the correct identity of the dead man on the cross. Have you? Do you see who Jesus is? Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Nothing and no one could stop the cross of Christ. Temptations to bypass the cross failed. Angry mobs could not cause the cross to happen too early. Jesus went to the cross right at the appointed time according to the Father's perfect plan. Having failed to stop the cross, the Deceiver wants to discredit and deny the cross. The Pharisees really had been listening to Jesus's promise that he would rise again. They didn't believe that he would be raised, but they wondered if the disciples would attempt to steal the body and fake a resurrection. After all, liars always assume everyone else is lying. When the laughable attempt to secure the tomb failed, the chief priests and elders bribe the soldiers to say that the body was indeed stolen. The lie has spread among Jew and Gentile alike down to this very day. The Deceiver continues to feebly do all he can to deny and discredit the cross that he could not stop.

The truth is that the Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. The first witnesses of the resurrection are the two Marys. They didn't expect the empty tomb anymore than the terrified soldiers. In the midst of their confusion, they see an angel shining like lightning dressed in pure snow. The angel announces, "He has risen; He is not here! Come and see. Go and tell." What Jesus had prophesied has now become reality. He told the Jews about himself, "Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up." (Jn 2:19). Just as Jesus took the twelve-year-old girl in Mark 5 and raised her up, now Jesus too has been raised up. Just as Jesus took the boy at the bottom of the mountain in Mark 9—the one who was convulsing under the power of an unclean spirit, and Jesus cast out the demon and took the boy by the hand and raised him up—now Jesus too is raised up. Just as Jesus stood at the tomb with Mary and Martha and commanded with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43) now too Jesus has come forth. He is not here. He is risen. So many times Jesus has taken deadly situations and brought life. Now he is alive forevermore. Everything in God's big story has been building to this point.

Come and see. Search the Scriptures. Cross-examine the witnesses. See if the things the Bible says are so. After being convinced that the Lord is risen, go and tell. Tell others that Christ has defeated sin, death, and the grave. Do not be silent. He is risen indeed.

Weekend Devotion:

Huldrych Zwingli: The Reformation's Third Man

To cite the subtitle of a 1959 biography of the great Swiss Reformer, Huldrych Zwingli has been very much “the third man of the Reformation.” As such, he has been overlooked to a significant degree by Reformation scholarship. That scholarship has found it easier to focus on Luther and Calvin, both of whom left a clear tradition.

Moreover, Zwingli's martial approach to the reforming of the late medieval church — which culminated in his death on the battlefield at Kappel in October of 1531 — is hardly a model for imitation. While Zwingli's fellow Swiss Reformers sought to put Zwingli's violent death in the best possible light, other Reformers, such as Martin Luther, were not so sanguine about what took place at Kappel. In Luther's words, Zwingli had died “in great sin and blasphemy.” The challenge of making sense of Zwingli's end reveals the Swiss Reformer to be a complex figure whose story defies both hagiography and demonization.

To Scripture and Zurich

Zwingli's birthplace was some forty miles from Zurich in a typical Swiss chalet well over three thousand feet above sea level. After high school in Basel, he attended the University of Vienna for four years and then returned to Basel to study at the university there, a center of Renaissance scholarship. Under the influence of the scholar Thomas Wyttenbach (1472–1526), Zwingli became committed to the Renaissance ideal of studying the sources of Western culture on antiquity, which led him to embrace the necessity of affirming sola Scriptura for the Reformation of the church (though his own spiritual awakening was still to come).

After the close of his formal academic studies in 1506, he received a call to be the priest in the rural parish of Glarus, where he was to remain till 1516. During this time, he began to seriously question the nature of late medieval Swiss society and its failure to reflect the Christianity of the Scriptures. The Swiss supplied much of southern Europe with mercenaries — indeed, the Vatican still has a Swiss Guard — but with the young men away fighting for money and glory, their communities were being reduced to poverty. Such issues of societal and political declension and the need for community renewal set Zwingli on the road to the Reformation.

A short spell at nearby Einsiedeln, the site of a popular shrine to the Virgin Mary, followed from 1516 to 1518. Sadly, this period ended amid well-founded accusations of sexual impropriety with the daughter of an influential figure in the community. A gift for preaching, though, led to Zwingli's appointment in late 1518 to the Grossmünster, the main church in the heart of Zurich, a city home to some seven thousand people.

Reformed Turning Points

From almost the very outset of his ministry in Zurich, Zwingli made expositional preaching the heart of his pastorate. In 1519, he also came across some treatises by Martin Luther that convinced him of justification by faith alone. To Zwingli at this time, Luther was nothing less than a new Elijah. But the Zwinglian Reformation was not ultimately dependent on Luther. In Zwingli's words, "If Luther has drunk where we have drunk, then he has in common with us the evangelical doctrine" (Ulrich Zwingli: Early Writings, 176).

In August of 1519, the Black Death (the bubonic plague) also struck Zurich, killing some 1,500 people. Zwingli himself was stricken and came near to death — indeed, rumors outside Zurich placed him among the dead. But he recovered. It was a key turning point in his life, for he committed himself unreservedly to God and the implementation of his will in the Swiss town. As he wrote of God in November 1520, "I have learnt to submit myself utterly to His divine will."

A second turning point came on the evening of March 9, 1522, during Lent, the traditional medieval time of preparation for Easter. That evening, one of Zwingli's friends had a simple meal of sausages with some other friends. But this was in defiance of church law, which forbade the eating of meat during Lent. Zwingli, who was present, did not partake, but neither did he object. In fact, the following month, Zwingli issued a short pamphlet defending the sausage-eating that evening and more generally affirming the freedom that God's people have in Christ.

No More Mass

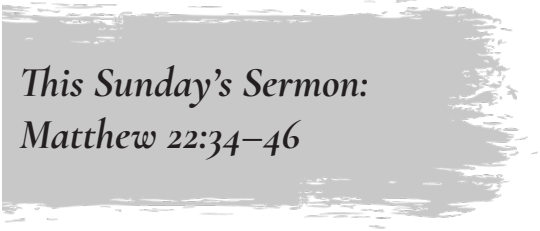
The key turning point came, however, in 1525, when the mass was abandoned in Zurich. By this point, Zwingli, like Luther, had come to reject the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation in which the Church of Rome argued that the bread and wine ceased to be bread and wine as they became the very body and blood of Christ. But whereas Luther was convinced that the Lord's Supper still conveyed the very body and blood of Christ along with real bread and wine, Zwingli believed that Christ's presence was spiritual and not corporeal. When the two German Reformers met at Marburg in 1529, this difference proved to be a major roadblock to a union of these two remarkable men and their Reformations.

Two years after this meeting that spelled the decisive division between the Lutheran and Reformed wings of the German Reformation, Roman Catholic troops marched on Zurich in the confidence that the Lutherans would not come to the aid of the Zurichers. Although Zwingli died in the ensuing conflict, the Zurich Reformation continued under his loyal coworker, Heinrich Bullinger. And thus Zwingli's passion for the Scriptures and his determination to live solely under their authority became a key

component of the Reformed tradition.

Coda: Sadly, the division between Zwingli and Luther was not the only schism in the early days of the Reformation. In 1523, some of Zwingli's closest supporters, notably, Conrad Grebel (c. 1498–1526) and Felix Manz (c. 1498–1527), became convinced of believers' baptism, pacifism, and a strong separation of church and state. Their formation of a distinct community, the Swiss Brethren, led to Zwingli's labeling them Anabaptists ("re-baptizers"). And when the Zurich leadership executed four of the Swiss Brethren in 1527, including Felix Manz, Zwingli tacitly supported this unbiblical method of dealing with Dissent.¹

¹ Article written by Michael Haykin found at DesiringGod.org as part of the Here We Stand series



This Sunday's Sermon:
Matthew 22:34–46

Hymn of the Month

“How Sweet and Awful Is the Place”

Isaac Watts’ hymn “How Sweet and Awful Is the Place” (1707) draws us into the wonder of God’s saving grace. In Watts’ day, “awful” meant awe-inspiring, not dreadful, and the hymn captures the reverent joy of entering Christ’s presence at the gospel feast. This banquet imagery recalls Isaiah’s promised feast for all peoples (Isa 25:6), Jesus’ parables of the wedding supper (Matt 22:1–14; Luke 14:16–24), and finally the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–9).

The hymn opens with Christ present among his people as everlasting love spreads out its rich stores (st 1). From there, the praise of the gathered church turns personal: “Lord, why was I a guest?” (st 2). Paul answers with astonishment of his own: God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world. . . In love he predestined us” (Eph 1:4–5). Such grace is staggering, especially when we remember how many turn away and “rather starve than come” (st 3; cf. John 3:19).

Watts reminds us that the same love that spread the feast also drew us in (st 4; John 6:44). Left to ourselves, we would still refuse and perish in sin (Eph 2:1–5). The only explanation is grace. That recognition moves us outward in prayer for the nations: “Send Thy victorious Word abroad, and bring the strangers home” (st 5; cf. Ps 67:2). The hymn closes with longing for the day when every tribe and tongue will join in one song of redeeming grace (st 6; Rev. 7:9–10).

Give thanks that God has seated you at his table, and ask him to send forth him Word until every seat is filled.

-Pastor Laramie



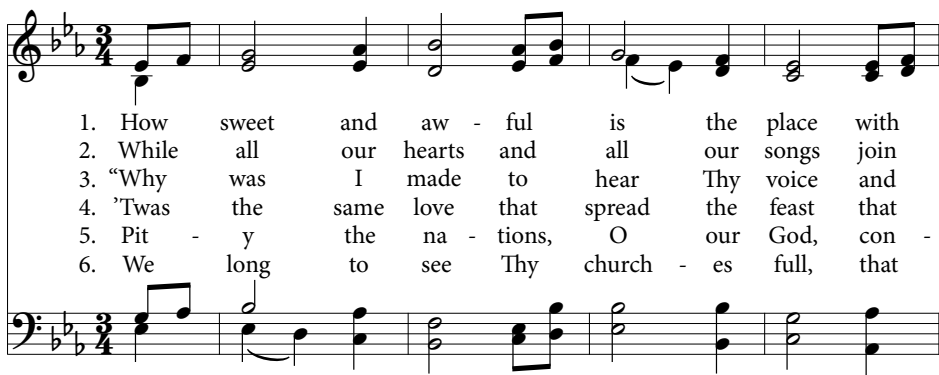
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How Sweet and Awful

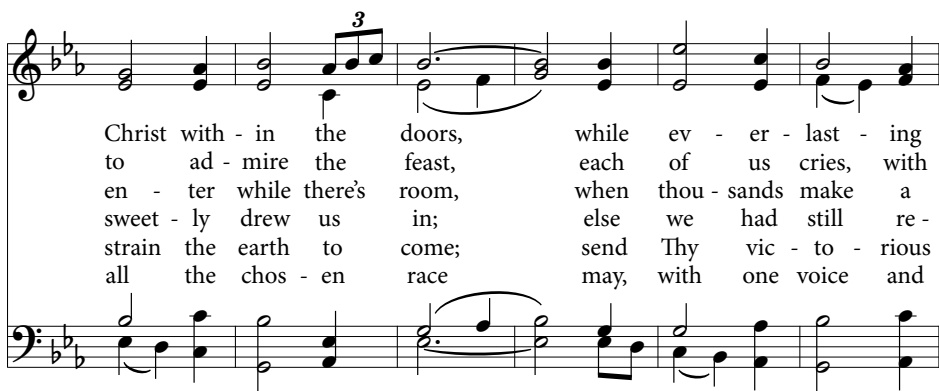
Isaac Watts, 1707, alt.

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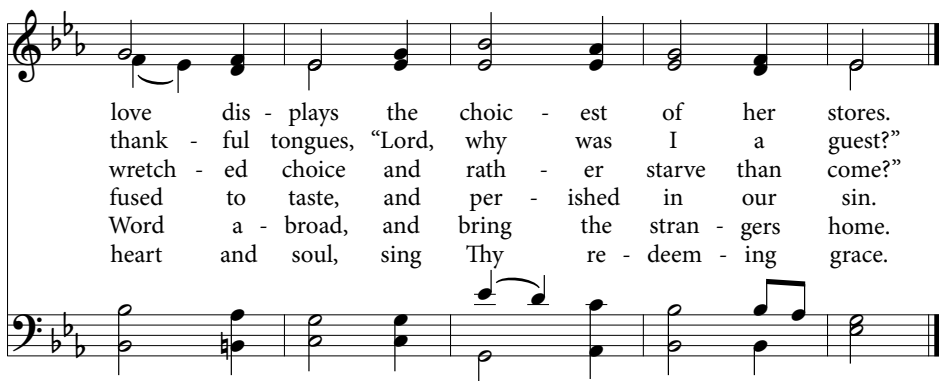
Irish melody
harm. *The English Hymnal*, 1906



1. How sweet and aw - ful is the place with
 2. While all our hearts and all our songs join
 3. "Why was I made to hear Thy voice and
 4. 'Twas the same love that spread the feast that
 5. Pit - y the na - tions, O our God, con -
 6. We long to see Thy church - es full, that



Christ with - in the doors, while ev - er - last - ing
 to ad - mire the feast, each of us cries, with
 en - ter while there's room, when thou - sands make a
 sweet - ly drew us in; else we had still re -
 strain the earth to come; send Thy vic - to - rious
 all the chos - en race may, with one voice and



love dis - plays the choic - est of her stores.
 thank - ful tongues, "Lord, why was I a guest?"
 wretch - ed choice and rath - er starve than come?"
 fused to taste, and per - ished in our sin.
 Word a - broad, and bring the stran - gers home.
 heart and soul, sing Thy re - deem - ing grace.

Weekly Calendar at Ramah

Sundays:

Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.

Worship Service: 11:00 a.m.

Equipping the Saints: 5:00 p.m.

Wednesdays:

Prayer Meeting: 5:45pm



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