

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE STUDENT

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EXAMINING OUR FAITH

▶ International Sunday School Lessons

Examining Our Faith

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Sustaining Our Faith

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Background Scripture: Jude

Today's Scripture: Jude 17-25

I. Remembrance Jude 17-19

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

17. *Remember!* That is the main point (compare Jude 5). After describing the characteristics of these false leaders and the judgment that awaits them, Jude reminded his readers that this was not unexpected. *The apostles* warned about the rise of ungodly people who would disturb the church and seek to gain their own followers. For example, the apostle Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus that wolves would arise from among their own leadership (Acts 20:29). Consequently, the situation should not have surprised them. The apostles told them it was going to happen.

By reminding them of this apostolic warning, Jude highlighted the importance of the apostolic voice in the early church. The apostolic word, or teaching, both guides and warns the church. According to Acts 2:42, the disciples of

Jesus devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. The church listens to the apostles of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, heeds their direction and warnings, and follows them as they follow Jesus. Their teaching, along with the prophets, is the church's foundation, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. Jesus sent the apostles with His authority, and the apostles spoke for Jesus.

In the middle of this perilous time, Jude not only reminds his readers of the apostolic warning but also reminds them who they are. They are *beloved*, and Jude called them as such three times (Jude 3, 17, 20). While we need reminders about the dangers of any situation, we also need reminders that we are loved by God and loved by our leaders. Jude, for example, was a leader who wrote forcefully against false teachers but compassionately for those whom those ungodly leaders endangered. Believers have been called by God and kept safe in Jesus Christ. Despite the dire circumstances and uncertainties of the times, they are secure in Jesus and loved by God.

18. What did the apostles say to the church? A time was coming and had already arrived when *mockers* and scoffers would arise within churches, and their only concern would be pursuing their own *ungodly* interests.

When Jude used the language of *the last*

time or “last times,” he was not referring to something in the distant future, though it includes that. Rather, he reminded his readers about this warning because it was already happening in their congregations. Often “last time” or “last days” refers to the last era of God’s redemptive work in the world. This is the final era because after this comes the judgment of God and the salvation of God’s people. It was important to hear the apostolic warning not only applying to some final moment in the world’s future but also to Jude’s readers and the whole history of the church. Mockers and scoffers have always been part of the story of the church, and the warning is for all believers throughout the life span of the church. This is a constant danger rather than a unique one.

19. Jude described these ungodly people in three ways. They (1) are divisive, (2) are worldly, and (3) lack *the Spirit* of God. In essence, Jude identified this ungodly presence by their works or their effect on the congregation. They lacked the fruit of the Spirit. There was no evidence of the Spirit in their lives. They created divisions as they separated themselves and created their own followers. They lived by the seat of their pants. In other words, they lived by their natural urges and impulses rather than by the mind of Christ. Their interests were rooted in their sensuality and the works of the flesh. They were not led by the Spirit but by their *sensual* compulsions driven by their ungodly agenda.

II. Perseverance

Jude 20-23

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

20-21. Jude contrasted his readers with these ungodly mockers. While the ungodly mock the faith, believers build their lives on the faith. While the ungodly lack the Spirit, believers pray in the Spirit. While the ungodly scoff at the judgment that accompanies the coming of the *Lord Jesus Christ*, believers joyfully anticipate the mercy they will receive when Jesus comes again. Jude addressed these believers as *beloved*, and this belovedness was rooted in God’s love for them. It was not simply Jude’s love for his readers but also their relationship with God as people who are beloved of *God*. God loves them.

In the Greek text, the main verb—and the only imperative or command—is *keep yourselves in the love of God* (Jude 21). This was a call to action. Jude thought believers ought to respond to perilous times by persevering in God’s love. In other words, as dangers mounted and seemed to overwhelm, believers need to continually ground themselves in God’s love. Jude called believers to pursue godly living by remembering that they were beloved.

But what does that look like? Jude gave his readers three cues: (1) by building on the *most holy faith*, (2) by *praying in the Holy Ghost*, and (3) by looking forward to *the mercy of Jesus*. These three cues were means of grace or spiritual practices that could sustain faith during perilous times Jude’s readers endured.

First, they can build on the foundation of the faith. The faith for which the Christian community was to contend is also the foundation for remaining in the love of God. The *faith* refers to the work of God in Jesus by the Spirit to redeem

and save the world from its ungodly lusts and practices. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Believers build on an authentic foundation secured by the love of God, the grace of Jesus, and the communion of the Holy Spirit rather than one imagined by the mockers who stirred up trouble among the churches.

Second, they should pray in the Spirit. This includes two important points. On the one hand, Jude thought prayer was a necessary response to perilous times. Prayer calls upon God to act and deliver. On the other hand, prayer was not simply wishful thinking but addressing God in the Spirit. To pray in the Spirit is probably a rather broad idea that includes almost anything that could be said about prayer. The full meaning of prayer includes not only the work of the Spirit in hearts but also the function of the Spirit in communicating the prayers. We pray in the Spirit when we pray in accordance with God's agenda, pray out of a heart sanctified by the Spirit, and pray by the power of the Spirit who unites us with God's own heart.

Third, they should trust in the mercy of God. The faithful looked forward to the day when the fullness of God's mercy will be poured out on believers to usher them into eternal life with God. The second coming of Christ, though it involves judgment for the ungodly, is mercy for believers who build their lives on the most holy faith and pray in the Spirit.

Importantly, these verses refer to the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Jude recognized the Triune God by naming the love of God, the mercy of Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

22-23. Jude invited his readers to remain in the love of God, and then Jude turned his attention to how his readers ought to love others with that love. Re-

maining in the love of God means pouring out that love on others.

III. Praise God Jude 24-25

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

24. Jude concluded his letter with a doxology. The doxology first identified what God is doing for us, and then it attributed to God what rightfully belongs to Him.

While Jude stressed that believers are responsible for keeping themselves in the love of God, he also made it clear that it is God who empowers our perseverance in that love. God keeps us, while believers are also accountable for their own faith as well. Ultimately, believers do not save themselves, nor do they generate their own assurance. Rather, God acts to keep us and causes us to stand in His *presence* without blemish.

25. Because of God's gracious mercy, Jude praised God's eternal *glory*, *majesty*, *dominion*, and *power*. These characteristics or attributes describe God's relationship to the world and, consequently, God's own capacity both to keep us from falling and present us without blemish.

Since this doxology is offered to God through Jesus, it constitutes a prayer of praise. As Jude has already told us, believers pray in the Spirit. In effect, then, Jude offered a triune prayer. God is praised through the Son in the Spirit. That is the most holy faith. God poured out mercy through the Son by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we joyfully return to God the Father our praise through the Son in the Spirit.

Involvement Learning

Sustaining Our Faith

Into the Lesson

What's the best advice you've ever received? Detail below whether or not you heeded that advice and what consequences resulted.

What factors might cause us to disregard advice even when we believe it to be sound?

It is good to be able to recognize when a good leader has our best interests at heart. Jude's words in our lesson today encourage us to remember what we know of God and to remain true to Him.

Into the Word

Read Jude 17-19 and 2 Peter 3:3-7. Keeping these texts in mind, list some New Testament examples of scoffers.

Read Jude 20-23. List the seven actions mentioned in these verses.

Read Jude 24-25. How are believers able to resist living like the world?

How are believers able to live sustainably in faith and holiness?

Key Verse

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.
—Jude 20-21

Into Life

Which of Jude's directives do you feel most comfortable trying to carry out and which do you feel least equipped to do?

Write down a plan to live out Jude 20-21.

Thought to Remember

Secure in God's love, we are able to love others.

Testing Our Faith

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24

Background Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:5-11

I. Examination

2 Corinthians 13:5-6

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

5a. This is the second time that Paul has challenged the believers in Corinth to *examine* and *prove* themselves (the first time was in 1 Corinthians 11:28). The challenge was for the readers to undergo a season of spiritual self-discernment. This required the readers to stop questioning Paul's credibility and instead look to their credibility as Christian believers.

We note how the word *faith* is used in this context. This word usually refers to one's personal belief in Christ. Included in that understanding is the concept of trust. Therefore, the word *faith* in Scripture typically means belief plus trust. But that is not the sense here. Instead, the phrase *the faith* refers to the body of doctrine to be believed and practiced. Thus, Paul's challenge is not to examine oneself to determine how much faith his readers have in Jesus but rather to determine whether the readers accept his doctrinal teaching regarding the nature of the

Christian faith. The stress on the importance of being *in the faith* is highlighted by the bookend phrase *examine yourselves* and *prove your own selves*.

5b. Testing, both self-imposed and imposed by others, is necessary for evaluating one's status regarding whether *Jesus Christ is in* him or her. The test is not graded in terms of letter grades, such as an A- or a C+. Neither is it graded on a "curve." Instead, it's simply Pass/Fail. Either Jesus is in you, or He is not; there's no in-between. To fail in this regard is to *be reprobates*. As Paul uses the underlying Greek word elsewhere, it is translated "unjust" (1 Corinthians 6:1) and "unrighteous" (6:9).

6. Here, Paul does two things to the phrase "except ye be reprobates?" from the previous verse: (1) he changes the question to a statement, and (2) he changes "ye" to "we." These indicate that Paul was confident that his proposed self-examination on the part of the Corinthians would cause them to realize who had the presence of Christ (Paul himself and most members of the church at Corinth) and who did not (the minority of troublemakers in that church).

The key to reaching the correct conclusion was ensuring that the proper criteria were applied to the assessment. Paul sprinkles these criteria throughout this

letter (examples: 2 Corinthians 10:2, 7, 12) and includes the general criteria noted in the next verse in our lesson.

II. Expectation

2 Corinthians 13:7-10

7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong; and this also we wish, even your perfection.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

7. As Paul prepared for his third visit to Corinth, he prayed *to God* regarding the church there. The nature of the prayer, is neither that of simple-minded wishful thinking nor one of mere psychological encouragement. Instead, the prayer calls upon God to strengthen the readers against *evil*.

In this light, we keep in mind that a significant theme of this letter is a defense of Paul's ministry and apostolic authority. The two main pieces of evidence that validate that ministry and authority were God's power that shone through Paul's weakness and the moral transformation of the members of the church at Corinth. For those believers to *do no evil* would maintain their growth with regard to that transformation. Paul hastened to add that this was *not that we should appear approved* (that is, for the sake of his reputation), but *that ye should do that which is honest* (that is, for the reputation of his readers).

8. The epistle of 2 Corinthians has been called the least organized of Paul's

writings. That's because he often seems to jump from topic to topic in a stream of consciousness. But here we detect an important and well-organized chain of thought: the confidence in 2 Corinthians 13:6 combined with the prayer in 13:7 leads to the certainty that gospel *truth* will prevail. Indeed, the importance of truth is a theme of this letter (see 4:2; 7:14; 11:10; 12:6). One truth was that Paul had not failed any test regarding the validity of his message and authority, though some Corinthians thought he had.

9a. Paul uses accusations from his critics and transforms them into an asset. Unlike the apostolic pretenders of 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11-12, Paul had neither sought wealth nor had tried to deceive. He was not a manipulator but one who lived authentically and without guile. Paul conformed his ministry to the gospel, which included his willingness to suffer and place himself in a position of weakness for the sake of others. He was willing to suffer the hardships and persecutions of gospel ministry if it meant strengthening the faith of the Corinthians. Paul willingly worked with his hands to be self-supporting so that the Corinthians would not be distracted by requests for financial support. This was Paul's joy. He gladly lived in weakness so that the Corinthians might live in strength.

9b. We may wonder what exactly is entailed in Paul's desire for the Corinthians' *perfection*. The Greek word being translated occurs in its noun form only here in the New Testament. But in its verb form, it appears five times in Paul's letters. In four of the five cases, it refers to movement from one state of being to a better one (1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:10). In the remaining case, it refers to the opposite (Romans 9:22). Using the two passages from the Corinthian letters

as touchstones, the idea is one of church unity that results from the repentance of rebellious believers.

Paul prayed that God would sufficiently equip them for life in the gospel. Paul prayed that God would move their hearts toward good and away from evil and fully equip them to participate in the ministry of reconciliation with Paul rather than oppose Paul.

10a. The opening *therefore* introduces Paul's expanded explanation of why he wrote this letter rather than waiting to deliver the message in person. Paul wants the Corinthians to listen to the letter's sharp words so that he does not have to exercise his apostolic authority when he visits. The responsibility of those who occupy leadership positions in the church includes giving an account to God for the souls of those they served. Sometimes, this responsibility requires reproof and rebuking those who oppose the truth.

10b. Even so, Paul's purpose was not to destroy the Corinthians but to edify them. Again, he states the ultimate validation of his apostleship: *the power which the Lord hath given him*. God's goal was and is the making of disciples who grow in maturity. But when disobedience abounded, and the gospel was subverted, Paul intended to use his authority to tear down evil in the congregation. Yet, that was and is a last-ditch solution, and it was not the response that Paul desired. Therefore, he wrote this letter to prepare the Corinthians for his visit, call them to self-examination, and remind them of his desire for their growth in the gospel.

III. Exhortation

2 Corinthians 13:11

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

11a. Paul concluded by reaffirming his relationship with the Corinthian audience. They were his siblings (*brethren*) in Christ. He had not given up on them. On the contrary, he remained connected to them as part of the family of God. Paul loved the Corinthians not only as spiritual siblings but also as their spiritual father.

With such familial affection, Paul concluded this section with five brief and pointed challenges. The first of his challenges is found in the word translated *farewell*. The underlying Greek also occurs in its identical form in Philippians 3:1 and 4:4. There the translation is the imperative "rejoice," and that is the sense here.

The second challenge, to *be perfect*, translates the verb form of the noun translated "perfection" in 2 Corinthians 13:9. This command echoes Jesus' imperative to "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), although a different word is translated there. We know, of course, that perfection in this life is unattainable since all have sinned. But that doesn't mean that the standard should be lowered!

The third command, *be of good comfort*, seems to be a condensed version of 2 Corinthians 1:4-6. The fourth command, *be of one mind*, stresses the importance of church unity. This can speak to doctrinal unity, but also essential is a shared humility that lives worthy of the gospel. Such unity will achieve the fifth imperative: *live in peace*.

11b. Paul writes of the God "of peace" several times in his letters. But this is the only time he writes of *the God of love and peace*. The practice of the five imperatives would shape the Corinthian church along those two lines. God had not given up on the Corinthian church, nor had Paul. On the contrary, both were committed to the church.

Involvement Learning

Testing Our Faith

Into the Lesson

Do you enjoy trying new things that might be out of your comfort zone? Why or why not?

It is usually fun for us to test our abilities, but not as fun when we realize personal limits or weaknesses. In today's lesson, identify what is being tested, how it is being tested, and why that test is necessary.

Into the Word

Read Matthew 7:18-20; John 13:35; 14:15; Romans 10:9; and 2 Corinthians 13:5-6. How do these additional passages inform self-examination regarding whether a person is "in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5)?

Read 2 Corinthians 13:7-9. Write down the names of two or three influential spiritual mentors. Why have those mentors been influential?

Read 2 Corinthians 13:10-11 and choose one concept from this list: *Perfect Wholeness*, *Comforting Encouragement*, *One Mind*, or *Living Peaceably*. Then answer the following questions:

How does 2 Corinthians 13:10-11 address the concept you chose?

How does this concept build others up?

What do you need to do to develop this attitude?

Key Verse

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.

—2 Corinthians 13:5a

Into Life

How did your actions and attitudes during the last week demonstrate your faith in Christ?

What is a "test question," like the one above, that you can create that reflect's Paul's challenge in 2 Corinthians 13:5a?

Thought to Remember

Testing yourself is not optional.

Defending Our Faith

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 4:1-8

Background Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Today's Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

I. Right Behavior

1 Peter 3:8-12

8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

8a. Verse 8 as a whole is only nine words in the original language. Five of those nine words are adjectives that describe behavior fitting for believers facing a hostile world.

The first adjective, translated as *one mind*, describes the desired unity of believers. Unity is a gift from God (Romans 15:5-6).

8b. *Compassion* is the translation of the second of the five adjectives. Were we to take the individual letters of the underlying Greek word and flip them to their

sound-alike letters in the English alphabet, we would hear the word *sympathy*.

8c. Repeating the procedure from verse 8b, converting the individual letters of the underlying Greek word to their sound-alike letters in English results in hearing the word *Philadelphia*—the city of brotherly *love*. Believers are described as part of God's household or family. Therefore, the third adjective describes the love that family members are to have for one another.

8d. This verse's fourth and fifth adjectives elaborate on how believers can live with love and compassion. The word translated *be pitiful* is also translated "tenderhearted" in Ephesians 4:32, and that is the sense here. To have heartfelt concern toward others is a crucial part of the life of a believer. Its presence reflects a life transformed by God's love.

To *be courteous* is probably an umbrella term that includes deference, kindness, and thinking of others more highly than oneself.

9a. The command regarding *not rendering evil for evil* can be found in several other passages (examples: Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; Matthew 5:39, 44; Romans 12:17, 19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). An aspect of evil treatment the original readers had suffered or were suffering was *railing*. The idea is that of slander, reproach, or

insult. Jesus himself had faced mocking and insults leading up to and during His crucifixion (Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 22:63-65). However, He did not respond to His abusers in the manner in which He was treated.

9b. It's not sufficient merely to refrain from rendering evil for evil. Rather, potential evil reactions are to be replaced with actual holy reactions (Matthew 5:44). This should not be confused with a salvation based on works, for Peter has already established salvation as God's work (1 Peter 1:3, 23). As a result of our salvation, we are to be conduits for God's blessing in the world.

10. This verse begins with a quote from Psalm 34:12-16, supporting Peter's point regarding the right kind of behavior amid trials and difficulty. According to this psalm's superscription, David wrote this psalm during a time of personal suffering and trials, as recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. Therefore, it was an appropriate psalm to cite to an audience of believers who themselves were undergoing trials. With this quote, Peter switches back to the negative, what-not-to-do imperatives but with greater specificity: *evil* as it comes from one's *tongue*.

The feature of Hebrew poetry known as *parallelism* is quite evident here. Note that the words *tongue* and *lips* are synonyms in the sense of being instruments of speech. The *evil* and *guile* they can produce are also parallel in meaning. The parallelism continues in the next verse.

11a. When Hebrew parallelism is present, then only one idea is in view, not two. Thus to *eschew evil, and do good* are to be seen as a single action. The way to avoid evil is to replace those impulses with doing good as one action. To avoid evil without replacing it with doing good introduces the danger noted in Luke 11:24-26.

11b. More Hebrew parallelism presents

itself in this continuing quote from Psalm 34:14: to *seek peace* is the same thing as to *ensue it*. God's people have peace with Him (Romans 5:1), and we are expected to seek peace in relationships with others (14:19). This is not peace "at any cost," but is peace "as much as lieth in you" (12:18). We don't yield or agree to unholy viewpoints merely to keep the peace.

12. This verse features a literary tool called *anthropomorphism*, which is seeing God in terms of human characteristics and behavior. "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24) and, therefore, does not have a physical body. However, Peter describes the Lord figuratively as having *eyes, ears, and a face*. Peter does this to help his audience better understand the Lord's character.

II. Confident Believers

1 Peter 3:13-17

13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

13. Another literary tool presents itself: that of the rhetorical question. Such questions are not intended to elicit an answer because the answer is obvious. The rhetorical question here contrasts an ideal

situation with what was likely already being experienced by Peter's audience, per the next verse.

14a. While Peter hoped to see good behavior receive proper recognition (see 1 Peter 2:13-14), this would not always be the case. Oppression is not inevitable for believers, but it is a possibility that all believers must prepare themselves to face—and not be surprised when it does.

The underlying Greek word for *happy* is elsewhere translated as “blessed” (Matthew 5:3-11; James 1:12; etc.). This clarifies that Peter was not suggesting those who suffer experience a masochistic enjoyment of their own pain. Blessing comes when people hear God's word and obey His commands (Luke 11:28). The ultimate blessing comes when a person receives forgiveness for sin through faith in Christ Jesus (see Romans 4:4-8).

14b. This half-verse alludes to Isaiah 8:12. That section of the book where it is located details a conflict between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. When Ahaz, king of Judah, was faced with the destruction of his kingdom, the Lord promised that Judah would be protected (Isaiah 7:3-9). Even though Ahaz and his people faced destruction, they were commanded not to be afraid. They were to fear the Lord rather than earthly opponents (8:12-15).

15a. Again, the challenge was (and is) to replace what is not to be done with what should be done instead. To *sanctify* means to designate someone or something being set apart as holy (John 10:36). The underlying Greek word is also translated as “hallowed” in verses proclaiming the holiness of God's name (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). Given the imperative tone of the verb *sanctify* as used here, we may wonder how we mere humans can possibly *sanctify the Lord God* more than He already is sanctified! Indeed, this verb is used in

its imperative tone only five times in the New Testament: here and in Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:12; John 17:17; Revelation 22:11.

The key to understanding all this is context. The context of the imperative in the verse before us is found in these three words: *in your hearts*. Humans certainly do not sanctify God by literally making Him holier than He already is! What we are to change, rather, is how we view Him.

15b. There are various areas in which Christians are to be ready. Peter specifies one of these: one's readiness *to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you*. Notice that this isn't addressing what preachers and Bible teachers are to do on Sunday morning to people who are already saved by the blood! Rather, it applies to all Christians as they (we) interact with unbelievers in everyday life.

15c. Any response that believers provide will be as effective only as the attitude with which it is given. In that light, the phrase *with meekness and fear* speaks to a low-key response. Such a demeanor is to characterize followers of Jesus.

16. The New Testament has much to say about the importance of one's *conscience* as it uses that word about 30 times. The conscience can be a marvelous guide to proper thought and behavior if it is properly informed in doing so (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Romans 9:1; etc.). When functioning as God intended, it is a moral alarm system (Romans 2:15). But one's conscience can be overridden by evil desires (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

17. Proper conduct (*well doing*) in all situations is an important theme in this letter (see 1 Peter 2:15, 20; 4:19). When believers *suffer* for such conduct, the result is a powerful witness for unbelievers. The ultimate example of suffering in this regard is Christ.

Involvement Learning

Defending Our Faith

Into the Lesson

What are some actions or behaviors that might be acceptable at a sporting event but would be inappropriate on a crowded bus, and vice versa?

Whether we realize it or not, everything we do is governed by rules or expectations. As we study the passage of Scripture today, consider what rules and expectations God has for His children.

Key Verse

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.
—1 Peter 3:17

Into the Word

Compare Matthew 5:43-48 and 1 Peter 3:8-9. What is the common theme between the two passages?

What did Jesus do in His ministry that shows this theme in action?

What “must do” and “must not do” actions did you find in the passages?

Read 1 Peter 3:10-12. What do these verses reveal about why we ought to follow the commands of verses 8-9?

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17. Describe a time when you have suffered in the past, and how God turned that suffering into a blessing.

Into Life

Referring to the first Into the Word section, choose one “must do” and one “must not do” from the verses, which you will put into practice in the week ahead. List them here and refer to them this week as needed.

Thought to Remember

Let suffering strengthen your faith.

Living in Faith

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 28:1-14

Background Scripture: Acts 6

Today's Scripture: Acts 6:7-15

I. The Growing Church

Acts 6:7-10

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

7. This verse reveals two important aspects regarding the growth of the first-century church. First, the church's development was caused by the dramatic spread of *the word of God*. As the influence of the gospel message *increased* among people, so did *the number of the disciples*. When the gospel falls on willing hearts, spiritual fruit will result, often in multiples.

Second, that their number *multiplied . . . greatly* implies that the *Jerusalem* church underwent rapid numerical growth. Comparing the number of believers in the first chapters of the book of

Acts reveals this expansion (see Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4).

Counted among these believers were *priests*. These men served in the temple when their lot was chosen (example: Luke 1:5, 8-10). They differed from the elite religious ruling class of the Sanhedrin. Instead, these priests would have been relatively poor. They would not have profited much from the wealth created by the temple.

8. *Great wonders and miracles* had been attributed to Jesus (examples: John 2:11; 11:46-47; Acts 2:22) and the apostles (examples: 2:43; 5:12). When the apostles did these things, it confirmed the presence of God's grace and the empowerment of His servants.

The book of Acts does not reveal the kind of miraculous work that Stephen did *among the people*. The apostles healed and restored people suffering from both physical and spiritual ailments (examples: Acts 3:1-10; 5:14-16). Therefore, it is likely that Stephen did similarly. Although Stephen was not an apostle, he had been chosen by God to give witness to salvation. Stephen was "full of *faith* and of the Holy Ghost" (6:5). His life demonstrated the spiritual *power* that had been promised by Jesus (1:8).

9. After the exile that began in 586 BC, the need arose for synagogues among the

Jewish people. These were locations for prayer and teaching of Scripture.

Libertines were Jewish people who had been liberated from slavery or who were descendants of those freed. These people were different from free-born citizens of the Roman Empire who had never experienced enslavement. Other groups included *Cyrenians* from northern Africa, *Alexandrians* from Egypt, and people from *Cilicia* and *Asia*, both located in modern-day Turkey.

Stephen's teachings gave these groups a reason for *disputing*. If he had only performed miracles and served food, it is unlikely that these groups would have had any dispute. However, what led to conflict with the synagogue members were his words.

10. That the synagogue members *were not able to resist* Stephen does not mean that they agreed with that message. Rather, they had no answer to his teachings. They had opposed the leading of God's Spirit. They were "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51).

Stephen had been chosen because he was "full of the Holy Ghost and *wisdom*" (Acts 6:3). His irrefutable words were a direct fulfillment of Jesus' promises to His disciples (Luke 21:15).

II. The Emboldened Opposition Acts 6:11-15

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

11. Stephen's wisdom did not sit well with the religious leaders. Unable to win an argument with him, they took a different approach to quiet him. Certain *men* were secretly persuaded (*suborned*) to speak up against Stephen regarding his teachings.

The charge of *blasphemous words* came from their understanding of Stephen's teaching regarding the Law of *Moses*. Their accusation had severe consequences for Stephen. The Law of Moses prohibited blasphemous language *against God* and the leaders of Israel (Exodus 20:7; 22:28).

12. *The council* refers to the Sanhedrin, a 70-member "supreme court" for matters regarding Jewish law. The group consisted of chief priests, *elders*, and *scribes*. Members of the Sadducees and Pharisees were also likely part of the council to some extent. The group carried significant influence in first-century Judaism. They had the power to level consequences for offenders of the law. Any claim that would have *stirred up the people* and the religious leaders would have been significant.

13. A *false* testimony would have been scandalous. The Law of Moses states, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). Luke does not say whether the Sanhedrin encouraged these *witnesses*. If they had, the council would have been guilty of supporting the attacks on Stephen.

The Sanhedrin met in a chamber connected to the temple. The charge that

they heard was that Stephen was preaching threats *against this holy place*. In the view of the Sanhedrin, this was a *blasphemous* act by Stephen. Blasphemy was a severe offense with serious consequences (see Leviticus 24:10-16).

14a. Their claims had a grain of truth. *Jesus* had indeed prophesied regarding the destruction of *this place*, the temple (Luke 21:5-6). *Jesus* never claimed that He himself would be the one to destroy the temple. However, He had faced charges similar to the ones brought before Stephen (see Matthew 26:60-61; 27:40; Mark 14:57-58). The point of *Jesus*' teachings was to serve as prophetic reminders regarding the temporary nature of the temple. In AD 70, *Jesus*' prophecies regarding the temple were fulfilled when the Roman commander Titus destroyed the temple.

14b. Some of the *customs* described in the Law of *Moses* included circumcision (Leviticus 12:3) and dietary practices (see Leviticus 11, 17). These things were a way for the Jewish people to separate themselves from Gentiles. Therefore, any teachings regarding a *change* to these things would affect their unique identity as a people.

Jesus' teaching transformed or set aside these customs. One way is found in His teaching on food and spiritual defilement. The Law of *Moses* indicates that consuming certain foods makes a person unclean. However, *Jesus* taught that what a person eats does not lead to defilement (Matthew 15:17-20; Mark 7:14-23).

Jesus did not seek to abolish the Law of *Moses*. Instead, His teachings and entire ministry fulfilled the law and the other writings of Scripture (Matthew 5:17). All parts of Hebrew Scripture—the writings of *Moses*, the prophets, the psalms, and the wisdom literature—served as guideposts that point people to *Jesus*. Rather

than nullify these Scriptures, *Jesus* fulfilled them through His life, death, and resurrection (see Luke 24:27, 44).

The charges regarding *Stephen*'s teachings were intended to unify the factions of the Sanhedrin against him. The temple was the primary economic engine of Jerusalem. It provided wealth for many people. Because Sadducees were elite members of the priesthood, they benefited from the wealth created by the temple.

The Pharisees, however, were on board for different reasons. Their interpretations of the law depended on their traditions. The prospect of the temple's destruction and the law's annulment threatened the power and influence of these parties. This threat to vested interests was what motivated the arrest of *Jesus* as well (John 11:48).

15. The New Testament describes angels as appearing like men (examples: Luke 24:4; John 20:11-12). However, no other instances regarding the angelic countenance of a human are provided in the New Testament. The phrase *the face of an angel* highlights the supernatural nature of the expression on *Stephen*'s face. His facial expression should have been a clue to the divine approval of his teachings.

The description also reveals the intimacy that *Stephen* had with God. Other people in Scripture experienced a change in their countenance after they had a personal experience with the glory of God (examples: Exodus 34:29; Luke 9:29).

Stephen began his speech to the Sanhedrin by referring to "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2). As he concluded, *Stephen*'s first view of Heaven would be to see "the glory of God, and *Jesus* standing on the right hand of God" (7:55). That vision was the final straw for the Sanhedrin as he was stoned to death by mob action (7:56–8:1a).

Involvement Learning

Living in Faith

Into the Lesson

Recall a situation in the media or news when someone was falsely accused. How did the accused person respond to the accusation?

How did they respond when the accusation was later revealed to be false?

There may be times when we face a situation that seems unjust or unfair. Our response reveals the nature of our faith in the Lord. Consider Stephen's response to accusations and how you might have responded.

Key Verse

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

—Acts 6:9-10

Into the Word

Read Acts 6:7-15. What are some words or phrases that describe Stephen?

What were the main points of the accusations brought against him?

What elements of truth might have been in the accusations?

Into Life

Who are the people you will interact with in the upcoming week?

What opportunities will you have to boldly share the gospel with them?

What are possible worst-case scenarios that could result from your gospel presentation?

How would you respond to these results?

Thought to Remember

God's wisdom, power, and peace will overcome the harshest opponents.

Significant Faith

by Jon Miller

The Greek word for *faith* appears over two hundred times in the New Testament. Its usage can refer to at least two different but related concepts. This quarter will explore the significance of faith and how the people of God live with faith.

Community Faith

The expression “the faith” refers to the beliefs and paradigms distinct to followers of Jesus (examples: Acts 6:7; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:13; Jude 3). The most central belief and the key to the faith itself is the resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Mark 16:1-8, lesson 5). Without Jesus’ death and resurrection, our faith would be in vain.

Following “the faith” consists of being filled with Christ and indwelt by God’s Spirit. The apostle Paul encourages believers to practice self-examination regarding the presence of Christ in their lives and whether or not they are “in

the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5, lesson 2). The point of this self-examination is not to win an argument or to fill oneself with pride. Instead, it aims to build up the body of Christ, which is the church (13:10-11).

Believers in the faith are likely to face trials and persecutions. Followers of Jesus have experienced these things since the birth of the church. One such example is that of Stephen, a man “full of faith and power” (Acts 6:7-15, lesson 4).

Additionally, believers are likely to come across the influence of false teachings. Therefore, the writers of Scripture frequently teach how a believer might defend the faith. Jude guards the “most holy faith” against destruction (Jude 17-20, lesson 1). Peter presents the faith as the foundation of the Christian life, worthy of defense (1 Peter 3:8-16, lesson 3). These writers encourage believers to contend for the faith.

Individual Faith

Scripture’s second use of the word *faith* consists of belief in Christ and trust in God. One way a person’s faith is revealed is through their decisions and behavior. The Gospels provide numerous examples of people who demonstrate faith through their actions. The faith of several men led them to seek healing for their friend (Luke 5:17-26, lesson 6). The faith of a centurion led him to ask Jesus for the long-distance healing of his servant (7:1-10, lesson 7). The faith of a certain woman demonstrated that



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The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Devotional Reading: Exodus 14:10-14, 21-23, 26-31

Background Scripture: Mark 16

Today's Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

I. The Women

Mark 16:1-4

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

1. Jesus died on a Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath. The Law of Moses prohibited work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:3). Therefore, the burial process would have to wait until *the sabbath was past*. The task of treating the body of Jesus would fall to the women, some of whom were at the crucifixion and subsequently had seen the tomb's location (Mark 15:47).

The name *Mary* was common in the first century AD. By one estimate, one in four women in Palestine was so named at that time. One of the women with that name was *Mary Magdalene*, who became a devoted follower of Jesus after He freed

her from spiritual oppression. The designation *Magdalene* was not a family name. Instead, it indicates that she likely came from the town of Magdala.

The second *Mary* is unknown to us. One possibility is that she is "*the mother of James the less and of Joses*" (Mark 15:40, 47). Another possibility is that she was "the wife of Cleophas" (John 19:25).

Matthew's account of the burial mentions a woman who is "the mother of Zebedee's children" (Matthew 27:56). This woman could be *Salome*, thus making her the mother of James and John.

Sweet spices combatted the stench of decaying flesh. These treatments were an essential part of the burial process. The women prepared these things before the Sabbath. They waited for the conclusion of that day of rest to return to the grave and *anoint* the remains of Jesus.

2. The phrases *very early in the morning* and *at the rising of the sun* reveal the eagerness of the women to complete their tasks. We assume that they set out just before sunrise, in the dim, pre-dawn light. The women were confident of their destination, having been there two days earlier.

3. What the women seemed to have forgotten is that a massive disk-shaped *stone* sealed the entrance to the grave. Several strong individuals would be needed to *roll it away* from the entryway.

The women's question also reveals the attitudes and behaviors of Jesus' followers. The disciples fled at Jesus' arrest. Peter, in particular, denied having known Jesus. Others likely hid out of fear for what might happen to them. Because of their grief, shame, or fear, some of Jesus' followers had distanced themselves from being associated with Him. They would not be of any help in removing *the stone from the door of the sepulchre*.

4. The Gospel accounts of Mark, Luke, and John do not reveal how *the stone was rolled away*. They only report that the stone was no longer blocking the tomb's entrance when the women arrived (here and Luke 24:2; John 20:1). Matthew, however, discloses that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door" (Matthew 28:2).

II. The Messenger Mark 16:5-8

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

5. Mark's Gospel does not provide further identifying information regarding the *young man sitting in the sepulchre*.

However, we can determine his nature from the other Gospel accounts.

Matthew 28:2 describes him as an "angel of the Lord." Luke identifies "two men . . . in shining garments" (Luke 24:4) who are "angels" (24:23); John 20:12 is similar. Scripture often describes heavenly beings in terms of the brightness of their garments (examples: Matthew 17:2; 28:3; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29-30; Acts 1:10).

The women came to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus. Instead of seeing His body, they saw an unknown visitor. The sight of this mysterious person would have been a valid reason for the women to feel *affrighted*.

6a. Fear is a common reaction to seeing an angelic messenger (examples: Judges 13:21-22; Matthew 28:4; Acts 10:3-4) or a supernatural occurrence (examples: Mark 4:41; 5:15; 9:4-6). When this occurs, a form of the reminder to *be not affrighted* usually follows (examples: Judges 6:21-23; Daniel 10:10-12, 19; Luke 1:11-13, 30; 2:9-10).

The angel's designation *Jesus of Nazareth* referred to the location of Jesus' upbringing. The village of Nazareth was located about 70 miles north of Jerusalem in the hilly region west of the Sea of Galilee. Residents of that village were likely impoverished. As a result, others held them in low regard. Jesus' parents were from Nazareth, and the family returned there after Jesus' birth. Jesus remained in Nazareth until He began His public ministry.

6b. The angel's proclamation that *Jesus is risen* does not mean that His spirit went to Heaven, leaving behind His dead body. The empty tomb reveals that His physical body was resurrected from the dead. His post-resurrection appearances provided further evidence of this reality.

The resurrection should not have come as a surprise to His followers. Jesus had prophesied to them numerous times

regarding His death and resurrection. However, His disciples rarely understood His teaching on this topic.

Burial customs during Jesus' day began with washing the body. Then the body was wrapped with cloths, treated with fragrant spices and ointments, and *laid* upon a flat surface in the grave. The command to *behold* that *place where* Joseph had *laid him* indicated that the tomb no longer contained the body of Jesus.

7. The command to *go* and *tell* of the risen Lord indicates a change in emphasis for Mark. In his Gospel, Mark frequently mentions times when Jesus urged others to be silent regarding His identity and work (Mark 3:11-12; 5:42-43; 7:36; 8:29-30). Now that Jesus' resurrection had occurred, His followers would not need to remain silent about Him.

Jesus' *disciples* had fled at His arrest. On that occasion, they were concerned for their safety. Rather than punish the disciples for leaving Jesus, the angel's message offered them a chance to reunite with their Lord.

The angel showed particular attention to *Peter* by naming him specifically. This apostle is known for his position of prominence, being named first in all listings of the apostles and for his impulsive behavior. He had confidently proclaimed fidelity to Jesus, even if it led to death (Mark 14:29-31). Later that same night, however, Peter thrice denied knowing Jesus (14:66-72). Later, after Peter received the women's report, he still had to see the empty tomb for himself (Luke 24:11-12).

Before Jesus' arrest, He had prophesied that His disciples would be "offended" and "scattered" (Mark 14:27). In the same breath, however, He promised, "After that I am risen, I will go before you into *Galilee*" (14:28). The angel's message to the women indicated the pending fulfillment of Jesus' promises.

The selection of Galilee as the location of this promised reunion was made with intent. Jesus began His public ministry there. It was in that region that He called His first disciples. The angel's message sent the apostles back to where their relationship with Jesus began.

8. Three strong emotions overwhelmed the women as they *went out quickly* and *fled from the sepulchre*. Their feelings were decidedly mixed; this is the only verse in the New Testament where the Greek words for *trembled*, *amazed*, and *afraid* occur together. The picture was one of uncertainty as the women found themselves in an in-between state: the empty tomb was initial evidence of a miraculous occurrence, but they had not yet seen the risen Jesus personally.

Some students believe that the original ending to this Gospel came at Mark 16:8 and that Mark 16:9-20 was a later addition in the decades after Mark wrote. Much of the information in verses 9-20 is reflected in the other Gospels (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 24:13-43, 50-51; John 20:14-18).

This verse abruptly ends with a declaration of the women's fear. If this were all we knew of the story, we would wonder what happened next. Praise God that we know the conclusion to this story—a story that continued with Jesus' ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:1-9) and will culminate with His promised return to earth.

Consider the abrupt ending to verse 8 as an invitation to proclaim the good news of the resurrected Christ. The women at the tomb that morning ran in fear; our task today is to run in joy with the message of the empty tomb. May we ever proclaim Christ's victory over death; may we never lose sight of the fact that His victory is ours as well—for eternity. Death could not permanently silence Jesus or obstruct God's plan. Will fear silence you from sharing this good news?

Involvement Learning

The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Into the Lesson

What's the best news you've heard this week? To whom did you tell this good news? How did others respond to this good news?

Today's Scripture recounts the best news the world has ever received. But this news was initially not received joyfully.

Key Verse

He saith unto them, Be not affrighted:
Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was
crucified: he is risen; he is not here:
behold the place where they laid him.

—Mark 16:6

Into the Word

Read Mark 16:1-8. Who went to the tomb?

Why did they go?

When did they go, and what was the reason for their timing?

How did they respond to the message they received?

Into Life

Complete this sentence:

*Sometimes I'm afraid to talk with
a nonbeliever about Jesus' resurrection
because . . .*

Fear is one possible reason believers are afraid to talk about Jesus' resurrection. That's understandable; fear was a response of the first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb. What would have happened if the women remained silent regarding the empty tomb?

What happens when believers today remain silent regarding Jesus' resurrection?

Complete this sentence:

*In order not to allow fear to result in
failure to speak up when doing so is neces-
sary, I will . . .*

Thought to Remember

Fear not—Jesus has risen!

Faith of the Persistent

Devotional Reading: John 4:4-18

Background Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

Today's Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

I. Faith That Seeks

Luke 5:17-20a

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.

19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

20a And when he saw their faith, he said unto him,

17a. The phrase *on a certain day* indicates that the events that follow probably occur on a day other than a Sabbath. Recognizing that this supposition is an argument from silence, we note that there are no complaints from Jesus' opponents concerning a Sabbath violation, as we see in Luke 6:1-11 and 13:10-16.

This verse includes the first of 27 mentions of *Pharisees* in the Gospel of Luke. Two factors indicate their presence to

have been an ominous turn of events. The first is that they were accompanied by *doctors of the law*. This rare designation is found only here, in Acts 5:34 (applied to the renowned Gamaliel), and in 1 Timothy 1:7 (regarding misguided aspirations). Much more often, Pharisees are said to be accompanied by "scribes" (examples: Luke 5:30; 15:2), a different Greek word being translated. Pharisees opposed Jesus (examples: Luke 11:53-54; John 11:45-57), with a few exceptions (examples: 3:1; 19:39).

The second ominous factor is that these religious leaders are not merely "local yokels" *out of every town of Galilee*. Instead, they include individuals from *Judaea* and *Jerusalem*. It's a long walk from Jerusalem and its temple to Capernaum—approximately 80 miles! For these religious leaders to commit to such a trip reveals a determined intent that the person and work of Jesus required a thorough investigation.

17b. With this phrase, Luke unites this event with Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus had read concerning himself when He was in Nazareth a short time before (Luke 4:16-21). The healings, both physical and spiritual, fulfill messianic prophecy.

18. The helping action of the friends of *a man which was taken with a palsy* is selfless and authentic. In their effort, the

friends show what Jesus called the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). This account does not specify how many men are carrying the bed, but Mark 2:3 does: there are four. This makes sense when we imagine something like a medical stretcher with one person at each corner.

19. The religious leaders' determination to investigate Jesus was matched by the determination of four men to have the suffering man healed by Jesus. This verse reads quite similarly to its parallel in Mark 2:4, except for Luke's phrase *into the midst before Jesus*, which Mark did not include.

First-century Palestinian houses typically had flat roofs with exterior steps or a ladder providing access. Roofs were built with beams resting on the outer walls, with smaller posts crossing the beams and covered with thatch and mud. The rooftop was a place for household activities, drying laundry, and getting fresh air. It was also where people sometimes hid, conferred, mourned, and prayed.

Even with outside access readily available, for the four men to climb the stairs or ladder while transporting the man was undoubtedly quite difficult—another sign of their faith and commitment. And lowering the man *down* would probably have required ropes, possibly an indication of advance preparation.

20a. The four Gospels mention *faith* a total of 24 times (in Greek), and Luke features 11 of those instances. The verse before us is the first (earliest) of those 11. Faith, being a mental and spiritual state, cannot literally be seen in and of itself by us ordinary humans. That limitation does not apply to the Son of God, however. He knows people's spiritual and mental states. But even though we lack the divine ability to see the faith (or lack

of faith) in someone's heart, we can certainly see evidence of faith in one's actions or inactions. What the crowd saw in the actions of the men Jesus *saw* in both heart and action.

II. Faith That Finds Luke 5:20b-26

20b Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

25 And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

20b. How Jesus addresses the man varies across the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Luke uses the generic Greek word for *man*, while the other two Gospels use the Greek word that can be translated as "son" (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5).

21. Not (yet) finding anything in Jesus' teaching to criticize, *the scribes and the Pharisees* focus their attention on His actions and implied identity. They are not correct in an absolute sense when they say

that *God alone* can forgive sins—people are encouraged to forgive sins committed against one another. But the scribes and the Pharisees are correct in the sense of a person sinning against God. According to Jewish writings in the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Jews expected a righteous Messiah who would overthrow foreign invaders. They did not expect a Messiah who would be God-in-the-flesh, able to forgive sins.

This unspoken question of the religious experts goes to the heart of understanding the person and work of Jesus. The experts actually had a good grasp of what was happening: Jesus was speaking and acting in a manner reserved for God.

22. Everyone present could see the evidence of the faith of the man and his friends in their actions. Jesus, however, was able to see the doubt and lack of faith in the *hearts* of the religious leaders. The ability to know people's hearts and innermost thoughts is one of the divine characteristics of Jesus that Luke emphasizes (Luke 6:8; 9:47; 24:38). With this ability, He was able to respond to their unspoken question with an audible question of His own. Although Jesus knew the thoughts of their hearts, He asked them a question, a method of teaching that He often used (2:49; 6:9, 39, 46; etc.).

23. Not waiting for an answer to His question, Jesus immediately poses another one. Some students see this as a "greater to lesser" argument. A simple example of this argument goes like this: "If a glass can hold eight ounces of water, then it can surely hold five ounces of water." Other students see it as the opposite—a "lesser to greater" argument. A simple example might be: "If it is illegal to shoot fireworks on the Fourth of July (a single day), then it is surely illegal to shoot them off on all other days."

24. This verse—worded almost the same as Matthew 9:6 and Mark 2:10-11—stresses that Jesus healed the paralyzed man as evidence of Jesus' authority to forgive sins. In this way, Luke again connects what has happened here to Jesus' reading of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue.

25. Earlier, Luke established Jesus' authority and power to heal and drive out demons (Luke 4:33-36). And we remember that *authority* is "the right to do something," and *power* is "the ability to do something." Luke is the only writer of the four Gospels to use both words together. Although the text now under consideration does not explicitly use those words, both concepts are present in this verse.

The man's sudden ability to walk was (or should have been) evidence that Christ had both authority and power to forgive sins. The statement *before them* is essential to this proof—everyone present saw the result.

26a. This is the only verse in the New Testament where amazement, glorifying *God*, and *fear* occur together as reactions of a crowd. The parallel verses of Matthew 9:8 and Mark 2:12a, by contrast, record only two of these three reactions each. We presume that the word *all* includes the religious leaders who were present. This was their first encounter with Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, and it's not unreasonable to conclude that they shared in everyone's reactions. Like everyone else, those leaders needed time to process the evidence for Jesus' deity just seen. Soon enough, however, some people will reach the wrong conclusion (see Luke 11:14-16).

26b. This is the crowd's fourth reaction, as recorded by Luke. This reaction, unlike that in Luke 4:28-29, is one of confused neutrality. It reaches no conclusion.

Involvement Learning

Faith of the Persistent

Into the Lesson

Write down the first three words you think of when you hear the word *friend*.

Look up the actual definition of *friend* and compare your own definition.

Into the Word

Read Luke 5:17-26. Under the following headers, write down the action verbs associated with each person or group.

Jesus

Religious Leaders

Friends

What do the lists of verbs reveal about the characters' motives?

What do these verbs reveal about the faith of the friends?

What do these verbs highlight about the disbelief of the religious leaders?

What do these verbs tell us about what is most important to Jesus?

What is the connection between the faith of the friends and Jesus' actions?

Key Verse

Behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

—Luke 5:18-19

Into Life

In the space below, create a definition of the word *friend* using only the ideas conveyed in Luke 5:17-26.

Thought to Remember

God enables us daily to be faithful friends.

Faith of a Centurion

Devotional Reading: Zechariah 8:18-23

Background Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

Today's Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

I. Desperate Need

Luke 7:1-5

1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

1. Jesus' teachings (*all his sayings*) and healing actions of the previous section (Luke 6:17-49) were concluded, so He moved from one place to another. The location of where He moved from is only given as "the plain" (6:17), perhaps referring to a suitably level site on or at the base of the mountainside. For Jesus to have then *entered into Capernaum* was probably not a long walk, given His record of movements around that area at the time.

2. A centurion was a soldier who commanded a unit known as a "century" in a legion of a Roman army. A Roman legion

ideally consisted of 59 centuries organized in 10 cohorts. The second through the tenth cohorts consisted of 6 centuries, each century having 80 men. A legion's first cohort was an exception. That cohort had only five centuries, but each of those, also commanded by a centurion, was at double strength. The math of all this adds up to 59 centurions in a legion of approximately 5,000 troops. Thus, the centurion in today's lesson was likely the most important and senior Roman official around Capernaum.

The *centurion's* domestic situation in the case at hand is indicated by his having at least one *servant* in his household. This servant was likely not a hired hand but an enslaved person owned by the centurion. Roman military campaigns often resulted in those people on the losing side being taken into bondage. Also common during this period were children born into slavery as the offspring of women who were themselves enslaved.

Luke, a physician, does not give us his specific diagnosis of the man's affliction; Luke gives us only the prognosis: he was *sick, and ready to die*. Matthew adds more information by noting that the servant was "sick of the palsy, grievously tormented" (Matthew 8:6). In contrast with the situation in Luke 5:18, the servant may have been too ill to be brought to

Jesus. Although people in antiquity had a limited understanding of disease and its causes, they could recognize the signs of unlikely recovery and impending death.

3. The centurion undoubtedly had heard of Jesus in two senses: through general word of mouth (Luke 4:14, 37) and specifically of His return to Capernaum. Perhaps the fact that the centurion sent his healing request via the elders of the Jews reflects an intentional strategy, reasoning that Jesus may respond more positively to fellow Jews than to a Gentile.

This verse paints a picture of an intelligent man who recognized and understood the cultural issues of Gentiles interacting with Jews. Rather than risk being spurned in a public, face-to-face meeting with Jesus, the centurion turned to Jewish leaders with whom he had become a friend in the community.

4-5. The elders who *came to Jesus* were apparently leaders of the synagogue in Capernaum. They did not convey the centurion's message as reluctant lackeys—they earnestly pled his case.

For some unstated reason, the centurion loved the Jewish *nation*. The proof of that love is found in an astonishing detail: the centurion had *built* Capernaum's *synagogue*. The expense might have included not only funding for the structure itself but also the interior furnishings: (1) a place to store scrolls for preservation and convenient access, (2) an elevated platform from which someone reading the Scripture would be visible to all in attendance, (3) lamps for illumination, and (4) adequate seating.

The need for synagogues as gathering places for worship and instruction in Scripture arose during the Babylonian exile that began in 586 BC. With the temple in Jerusalem destroyed and Jews far from their homeland, the people needed places to congregate; the word *synagogue*

is a Greek word that means “place of assembly.” The return from exile probably modified the function of synagogues to being primarily places of Scripture teaching rather than worship.

II. Unmatched Faith

Luke 7:6-10

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

6a. Capernaum was not a large city. Crossing from one end to the other would not have taken more than 15 minutes. Therefore, the time between when the elders spoke to Jesus and when the *friends* did so must have been very short.

Since the group was *not far from the house of the centurion*, the man may have seen Jesus and His entourage approaching before he dispatched delegation number two. These friends may have been either Gentile, Jewish, or both. The message they brought was surprising! This act demonstrated, among other things,

knowledge of and respect for Jewish law, customs, and sensibilities on the part of the centurion.

The parallel in Matthew 8:5 has the centurion himself speaking to Jesus personally. One way to resolve the tension between the accounts is to consider how that first-century culture would have viewed a messenger commissioned to speak on behalf of another person. In other words, when the centurion's friends talked to Jesus, it was as if Jesus was conversing with the centurion himself since that man had commissioned his friends to do so on his behalf. Matthew's Gospel, in a way, merely simplifies the account of the interactions.

6b-7. Although the centurion (through his friends) addressed Jesus as *Lord*, we should not automatically presume that the centurion acknowledged Jesus as the Lord God. The Greek word translated "Lord" occurs more than 700 times in the New Testament, and it is often used as simply a polite address of respect. In such cases, it is equivalent to our modern word *sir*.

The centurion's friends brought Jesus the unexpected message we see in the verses before us. Two things should be considered. First is the centurion's humility in admitting his unworthiness. Other admissions of unworthiness occur in the parallel passages Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; and Luke 3:16. The tension created between the theme of unworthiness here and the theme of worthiness in Luke 7:4-5 is interesting! Second, some students propose that in addition to admitting personal unworthiness, the centurion was demonstrating sensitivity in avoiding a potentially awkward cross-cultural meeting under the *roof* of a Gentile.

8. The centurion's plea was based on a hierarchical view of authority—a view that came from his military experience.

Earlier in Capernaum, Jesus had commanded a demon to come out of a man (Luke 4:31-37). Those who had witnessed it acknowledged Jesus' authority and power as a result. The centurion was undoubtedly aware of this miracle and thereby recognized an analogy to his own authority. Moreover, the statement of the centurion admitted the limitations of his authority. The centurion had authority over his soldiers. However, Jesus has unlimited authority over the world. Regardless of how we perceive the centurion's words, they emphasize Jesus' authority over all things—even sickness.

9. The four Gospels do not often speak of Jesus himself being amazed at something or someone. Almost always, it's the other way around: people *marvelled* at Jesus or something He did. The two exceptions are the *faith* of the Gentile centurion (today's text) and the lack of faith of the people of Nazareth (Mark 6:6).

Furthermore, Jesus did not actively seek to minister to Gentiles, only to fellow Jews. Even so, Gentiles sought Him out in a few cases. Jesus' initiative to the Samaritan in John 4:1-42 is unique. As far as Luke is concerned, the centurion's faith is the greatest miracle in this passage.

10. Jesus' healing miracles in the Gospels have been categorized in various ways. These include healings by touch (example: Matthew 8:15), command (example: Luke 5:24), and prayer (example: John 11:41-42). One interesting way of healing, not often considered, is miracle healing from a distance. There are three such: the ones involving (1) the Gentile centurion's servant in today's text and Matthew 8:5-13, (2) the Gentile woman's daughter in Matthew 15:21-28, and (3) the nobleman and his son in John 4:46-54. In all three cases, faith was vindicated.

Involvement Learning

Faith of a Centurion

Into the Lesson

What was an honor that you received that was a total surprise?

What is an example of praise you received that you would not otherwise give yourself?

Today we'll learn about a man who came to Jesus, desperate for help. However, this man didn't feel he was worthy to receive that help. Perhaps some of you will be able to identify with his feelings.

Into the Word

Read Luke 7:1-10. How did the centurion demonstrate faith?

How did the centurion show respect for Jesus? for the Jewish people?

Compare and contrast the elders' description of the centurion with his description of himself.

Why was Jesus impressed with the centurion's faith?

Key Verse

Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.
—Luke 7:7

Into Life

What are ways that we can exhibit faith as analogous to that of the centurion?

How can you develop and exhibit that faith in the upcoming week?

Thought to Remember

Have "Centurion Faith"!

What Can We Learn from History?

by Richard A. Koffarnus

Many people talk about the subject of history in negative terms. “History is more or less bunk,” said Henry Ford (1863–1947). “History is little else than a picture of human crimes and misfortunes,” complained the French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778).

Those who study and preserve history are also frequent targets of condemnation. “Historians,” one anonymous critic wrote, “fall into one of three categories: those who lie, those who are mistaken, and those who do not know.”

Yet without history and the historians who record it, we would be ignorant of the roots of our culture. Without that knowledge, society would have to constantly rediscover its foundations and core principles. For that reason, even the most primitive peoples, often without a written language, employ tribal historians to pass on their oral traditions.

Five lessons of this quarter are based on the writings of Luke, Paul’s traveling companion and coworker. Thanks to Luke, a physician by trade, we have a wonderful historical perspective on the life of Jesus. Luke also gave us the book of Acts, the inspired historical account of the first 30 years of the church. As you consider this quarter, challenge yourself to broaden your historical knowledge of the New Testament era by studying the world of Luke.

Understanding Historical Context

One way to make history relevant is to put the lesson material into a historical context. When did the events recorded by Luke take place?

Many chronologies of the life of Christ

exist. For example, the *Standard Bible Atlas* contains such a chronology, as does *A Harmony of the Gospels* by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry. The little pamphlet, “Chronological Outline of the Life of Christ” by Rupert C. Foster is also helpful. You can use reference tools such as these to supplement your Bible study. That way, you will always know where you are in your study of the life of Christ.

You can also investigate the historical context by investigating the question, “What was going on in the world at the time of these events recorded by Luke?” and “What relationship, if any, did this event have to life in first-century Israel?” Check your local library and the Internet for historical information on the time period between 5 BC and AD 30, the time period covered in Luke’s Gospel.

Another way to make history relevant is to “witness” it happening. There are several good video portrayals of the events of the Gospel of Luke. These portrayals include *The Jesus Film* and the television series *The Chosen*. Some narration is taken directly from Luke. They strive to recreate the look and feel of first-century Israel as Jesus experienced it. Through watching these, you can form mental pictures of the people, places, and events described by Luke.

Studying History’s Superstars

An approach once commonly used by historians, including Luke, is the so-called “great-man theory” of history. According to this approach, we can discover the causes of the significant events of the past by studying the important people of

history. Of course, Luke focuses his work on the greatest historical figure of them all, the Lord Jesus.

Still, there are other notables worth learning about who appear in the third Gospel. Luke mentions the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus as part of the background to the birth of Christ (Luke 2:1-2). How much do you actually know about this powerful ruler and his impact on the Mediterranean world?

Another important person in the Gospel of Luke is Pontius Pilate (Luke 13:1). Nearly everyone knows the role Pilate played in the crucifixion of Christ (23:2-6). Still, few know anything else about his life and work in first-century Israel. How did he come to power? What kind of governor was he? What became of him after the resurrection of Jesus?

The Less-Than-Greats

In recent years, the “great-man theory” of history has been replaced among historians by other approaches. One of the newer approaches deals with social history. Instead of focusing only on the big-shot “movers and shakers” of society, many historians now want to know what the less-than-great people were thinking and doing.

The theory here is that, more often than not, history’s great leaders respond to changes among the masses rather than the other way around. The social historian is interested in why such developments happened when they did and what effects they later had.

Although Luke was not a social historian, he gives us numerous glimpses of first-century Palestinian culture in his story of Jesus. Properly highlighted, these “snapshots” can help you understand better the significance of what Jesus was teaching and doing.

For example, in Luke 1, we meet John

the Baptist’s father, a priest named Zacharias. We learn from the appearance of the angel Gabriel that John is to be raised similar to a Nazarite, never tasting wine or strong drink. You will gain a clearer perspective of this declaration if you understand something about the work of a temple priest and the lifestyle and beliefs of a Nazarite.

Another example of one such “less-than-great” can be found in Luke 14:1-14. The setting of this passage is a Sabbath day banquet in the home of a prominent Pharisee. Jesus used the seating customs associated with such a banquet to teach on the nature of true humility.

Other customs mentioned by Luke include the presentation of the infant Jesus at the temple (Luke 2:22-35) and the celebration of Passover (2:41-52). To research these topics, you can consult Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, or books devoted to Bible customs. Of course, the Internet is an excellent research tool as well.

Twenty-Twenty Hindsight

Modern Christians have the advantage of being able to look back at completed events of salvation-history that the Old Testament prophets could only imagine (1 Peter 1:10-12). History is far from being “bunk”! Most Christians would agree that history is, in reality, “His story”—the workings of God in human affairs.

That being the case, we can only benefit from a greater understanding of the historical context of the New Testament since that knowledge will help us to interpret and apply God’s Word correctly. History thus becomes a window on the present and future work of God. As the French poet and politician Alphonse De Lamartine (1790–1869) observed, “Providence conceals itself in the details of human affairs but becomes unveiled in the generalities of history.”

People of Faith

by Jon Weatherly

Few words are as common in the church as *faith*. To modern ears, “having faith” means adhering to particular beliefs, affirming a specific understanding of God, and observing a tradition of worship.

That way of understanding *faith* has just enough in common with the word’s use in the Bible to be confusing. We can make better sense of what we read in the Bible, then, if we set aside our way of using the word and listen to the way the Bible’s ancient audience used it.

Faith as Basis

In the cultures of the Bible, faith was the basis of a relationship between persons. Among people, faith meant putting confidence in others and being the kind of person who deserved such confidence.

As ancient people thought about their relationship with the divine, faith was a natural concept to use. Pagan gods were seldom of a character to inspire confidence. But many who worshipped such gods still believed that faith in them was the foundation of society. Such belief affirmed that the gods existed, but it carried something more. If a person believed, then that person must act on that belief. To believe in the gods meant to honor the gods.

Faith as God’s Commitment

This concept of faith is hardly different in the Bible, though the object of faith is very different. The biblical God is unlike the pagan gods: powerful in every way but also utterly good, just, and holy.

This God is also gracious, merciful, loving, and forgiving. He has committed to bring the world back under His benefi-

cent rule. He expressed His commitment throughout the Old Testament. Though His people, like all of humanity, proved unfaithful, He pursued them with persistent faithfulness, inviting them back into a relationship with Him by His grace.

That contrast between humans’ failure of faith and God’s persistent faithfulness comes to its climax in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the one person who proved faithful to God. Jesus lived in utter submission to God the Father, trusting completely in Him. That trust took Jesus to the cross, where He expressed the full measure of God’s own faithfulness to wayward humanity.

In turn, God the Father was utterly faithful to His Son, raising Him from the dead and seating Him at the right hand of power. The Father and the Son then faithfully poured out God’s Spirit on God’s people. Through the Spirit, God faithfully empowers and directs His people today, committed to remain with them until the Son returns to gather them to himself.

Faith as Our Commitment

What does it mean to have faith in this faithful God? Faith in the faithful, triune God is a lifetime commitment of trust that produces faithful obedience.

The faithful have no worries about their future, confident that God supplies and protects. The faithful do not doubt how to live their lives, shaping them trustfully in submission to God’s Word and Christ’s example. Like servants whose master has left but has promised to return, they daily pursue the mission with which their faithful Lord has entrusted them.

Faith of an Anointer

Devotional Reading: Romans 8:1-16

Background Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Today's Scripture: Luke 7:36-39, 44-50

I. Three People

Luke 7:36-39

36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

36. The first use of the word *him* refers to Jesus. This is one of three times in Luke that Jesus was invited to a meal at the home of a Pharisee (see Luke 11:37; 14:1).

The motive behind the invitations seemed to be that of scrutinizing Jesus more closely, noting any violations of the Law of Moses as interpreted by *the Pharisees*. In so doing, they were asking the wrong question of themselves. That

question was: *Is Jesus on the side of truth as we know it?* But their question should have been: *Are we on the side of truth as Jesus is witnessing to it?*

37a. Some students have identified this *woman* as Mary Magdalene, who is introduced in Luke 8:2. But this identification is speculative. Unless the woman's arrival at *the Pharisee's house* was a "set up" to trap Jesus (compare Luke 20:20-26), it is safe to assume that she had not been invited. Therefore, the host did not welcome her presence at his dinner.

The scandal factor was multiplied by the fact that she *was a sinner*. Such a reputation probably suggests (but does not require) that the woman was a prostitute.

37b. This action indicates preparation for the woman's encounter with Jesus. The woman who later anointed Jesus in Bethany also had *an alabaster box* (Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3; see also John 12:1-3). These were appropriate containers for various oils. The woman's vessel held *ointment*, which is an aromatic perfume that could be rubbed into the hair or onto the skin. On that other occasion, Mark 14:3-5 establishes both the nature and value of the ointment. But no such specifics are noted in the scene before us. Even so, this may be at a great expense on her part.

38a. What happened must have surprised everyone. With no spoken word

recorded, the woman went from a posture of standing to one of kneeling near Jesus—that’s the only way for her to have been able to be in a position to wash *his feet*. It was customary to take off one’s sandals during a meal, and people would sit around the low table on their knees with their feet behind them. The text says nothing about why she was *weeping*. We can only speculate that her tears come out of a repentant heart.

38b. There’s more than meets the eye here as the woman used *the hairs of her head* as a washcloth. Women’s hair in this era was typically bound up. Therefore this woman’s letting her hair down was a departure from propriety. This act further suggests that she was lost in the moment with Jesus. She did not consider what anyone else might see or think.

39. Identities of local prostitutes were likely well known since the activities of such persons could not be secret for long in small villages. If the woman was indeed a prostitute, it explains why *the Pharisee* was scandalized that Jesus would not recognize her as *a sinner*. The Pharisee himself recognized her immediately.

The Pharisee’s unspoken thoughts condemned both the woman and Jesus. The Pharisee reasoned from a certain presupposition that he wouldn’t allow to be overturned: if Jesus doesn’t fit the Pharisee’s idea of how a prophet should conduct himself, then Jesus can’t be one. Jesus was thought to have carelessly allowed the woman’s touch. The Jewish people’s understanding of what made them unclean was often tied to touching. In general, touching anything considered unclean made the toucher unclean as well. Pharisees were obsessed with the avoidance of anything unclean or violations of the Law of Moses. This woman was the living embodiment of everything they warned against. The contrast between the woman,

who expresses her love for Jesus, and the Pharisee, who views her with disdain, could hardly be sharper.

II. Different Actions

Luke 7:44-50

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

44. An awkward situation ensued: Jesus *turned to the woman*, but His words were for the Pharisee. We also learn that the Pharisee’s name was *Simon*, a common Jewish name. Simon (or “Simeon”) was the second-born son of Jacob (Genesis 29:33), a patriarch of the tribes of Israel. Jesus had two disciples named Simon (Matthew 10:2, 4) as well as a brother (Mark 6:3), but this Pharisee was none of these.

Foot-washing was a centuries-old cultural practice. It was an act of hospitality for guests in one’s house. Footwear of the era did not keep dust and dirt out. Walking on unpaved roads resulted in

feet getting filthy quickly, thus the expedience of the foot-washing courtesy—or at least providing water and a towel for the guest to do the foot-washing himself. Yet Simon had not even provided those to Jesus! Simon's actions were cold and calculated; both he and Jesus knew it. What a contrast to the woman, whose actions were those of spontaneous gratitude.

45. As difficult as it may be for us to understand the ancient cultural practice of foot-washing, understanding the significance of a *kiss* is scarcely any easier! The missing *kiss* at issue here would have been an expression of greeting and welcome, customarily offered by a host to his guest. As with the absence of foot-washing water, the lack of a kiss indicates something less than full acceptance by the host.

46. To offer one's *head* to be anointed with *oil* also seems strange to us, something we would never expect when visiting a friend's home. But this, too, was a gesture of hospitality in first-century Palestine. The practice communicated favor. Simon had withheld this level of courtesy as well.

47. The Pharisee Simon had doubted Jesus' credentials as a prophet. But at this point, Jesus spoke with prophetic insight. The moral status of the woman as "a sinner" is uncontested—it is a given. But the scene depicted here illustrates the astonishing power and magnitude of God's forgiveness and its realization by the recipient. The woman's great love demonstrated that she knew she had much for which to be forgiven.

By contrast, Simon *loveth little* because his scrupulous attention to the Law of Moses had resulted in few sins to be forgiven of. Simon was proud of his tidy lifestyle as a Pharisee. He believed that he was vindicated by his success in keeping the Law of Moses strictly and by his descent from Abraham. The Phari-

see understood neither why he needed to love (and be loved by) Jesus nor how the woman's *sins, which are many* could be forgiven, especially by Jesus. In His encounters with sinners, Jesus walked the fine line between affirming the person while not condoning the sin, and that's what we see Him do here.

48. Jesus then spoke directly to the woman, but His words were for everyone in the room to hear. No such declaration of *thy sins are forgiven* is recorded for Simon the Pharisee.

49a. The Pharisee's invitation in Luke 7:36 above does not mention the presence of friends or colleagues of the host or whether any of Jesus' disciples were invited. But others were indeed present at the dinner, as evidenced by the phrase *they that sat at meat with him*.

49b. This is not the first time that Luke records controversy resulting from Jesus' forgiving *sins*. In the story of a paralyzed man of lesson 6, Jesus both healed the man and pronounced his sins to be forgiven (Luke 5:20; compare Matthew 9:2). The audience of scribes and Pharisees were outraged. But they spoke better than they knew with their rhetorical question, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:21).

50. The episode is closed with a final two-part word from Jesus to the woman. First, He clarifies the underlying reason for her forgiveness: her *faith*, which is the source of her love. By devoting herself to Jesus, she has yielded her heart to Him in repentance.

Second, Jesus' telling her to *go in peace* reminds us of His words to a sinful woman caught in adultery. After that woman's accusers left the scene, Jesus said to her, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Neither woman would have found peace if they had departed only to resume lives of sin.

Involvement Learning

Faith of an Anointer

Into the Lesson

Under the following headers, brainstorm books, songs, TV episodes, or movies that have themes fitting under one or both.

Rejection

Acceptance

How common is rejection in our culture?

What have you learned by being accepted just as you are by someone in your life?

Today's lesson will show us someone who was known for her sinfulness. Yet she risked further rejection to honor Jesus. As we look at the story, try to imagine what she, and those around her, were thinking as the incident unfolded.

Into the Word

Under the following headers, use your "sanctified imagination" to consider what each person might have been thinking and feeling in Luke 7:36-39, 44-50.

The Pharisee

The Woman

Jesus

Key Verse

He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.
—Luke 7:50

Into Life

What leads Christians today to sometimes think like the Pharisee in this story? How can Christians instead react more like Jesus?

What leads Christians today to react to Jesus with the passionate conviction this sinful woman displayed? What would prompt us to relate to Him more as she did?

Thought to Remember

To have forgiveness, we must first realize that we need it.

Faith of a Canaanite

Devotional Reading: Psalm 61

Background Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Today's Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

I. First Request

Matthew 15:21-24

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

21. This verse is not the first time Matthew's Gospel states that Jesus *went* from one area to another (compare Matthew 4:12; 12:15; 14:13). After He confronted the religious leaders (15:1-9), He *departed* from their midst.

Jesus frequently withdrew from crowds of people so that He could pray in solitude. He also removed himself from those who might misunderstand His ministry.

Tyre and Sidon were two prominent cities located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea north of Galilee, in the region that is modern-day Lebanon. Fol-

lowing the exodus, much of the area was designated for the tribe of Asher. Tyre was about 125 miles north of Jerusalem, with Sidon being an additional 25 miles farther.

The Law of Moses taught the Israelites to avoid following the pagan practices of other people groups. By withdrawing into the *coasts* near those cities, Jesus ensured that no Jewish person would follow Him into a Gentile region.

22a. The crowds that followed Jesus included people from the region of Tyre and Sidon. This *woman* undoubtedly had heard of Jesus and His work because of His popularity, as evidenced by those crowds.

Matthew describes her as being *of Canaan*, but Mark is more specific, noting that “the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician” (Mark 7:26). The Canaanites were an ancient people who had settled in Palestine before the arrival of the Israelites. During the time of the ancient Israelites, the Canaanites were considered the enemies of Israel. Their descendants became the Phoenicians—people living in the regions of Tyre and Sidon. This woman was certainly not of Jewish heritage, and her ethnic background would have been seen in a negative light by most first-century Jewish people.

Mark's Gospel provides other details

not given by Matthew. Mark states that Jesus “entered into an house” (Mark 7:24). This house was likely not the woman’s (compare 7:30). That Gospel also reveals that Jesus had intended for His presence in that region to be a secret, but “he could not be hid” (7:24). The fact that Jesus desired secrecy reveals that He did not initially intend for His journey into Gentile territory to be a teaching mission.

22b. The form of the designation *Son of David* appears 17 times in the Gospels. The designation comes from the hope that a descendant of Israel’s King David would someday rule with peace and justice. During the time between the Old and New Testaments, the Jewish people had strong expectations of this individual. They hoped the Son of David would come as a political leader to cleanse Jerusalem.

Because this designation reflected a uniquely Jewish expectation, it is shocking that a Gentile woman used it about Jesus. She would have been the most unexpected person to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited descendant of David.

The woman’s cry for *mercy* resulted from seeing her daughter suffer demon possession. The New Testament writers understand devils and unclean (evil) spirits as the same thing. Neither Matthew nor Mark describes the daughter’s symptoms. Others who experienced demonic possession also experienced physical disorders (examples: Matthew 9:32; 12:22). Therefore, we can assume that the daughter suffered similarly.

The way that Matthew’s Gospel presents the woman’s request is notable. She did not explicitly ask Jesus to heal her *daughter*, thus freeing the daughter from demonic possession. Instead, the mother desired to experience *mercy* herself. She was likely her daughter’s primary care-

taker, and the weight of that work had become an unbearable burden.

23a. Jesus’ refusal to answer the woman might seem cruel, but His silence reflects some cultural differences of His day. At that time, it would be considered inappropriate for a Jewish rabbi to answer a woman—and a Gentile woman, no less!

His silence could also be considered a test of the strength and quality of the woman’s faith. Jewish teachers and rabbis sometimes tested their students, and Jesus was no exception. The strategic silence created space for the woman to continue talking and explaining her desires.

23b. The woman had become a nuisance to Jesus’ *disciples*. They did not address whether they thought Jesus should grant her request. Instead, the disciples wanted the woman out of their midst. Did they not think she was worthy of Jesus’ aid because she was a Gentile woman? Or was it how *she crieth after* them that led to their dismissive attitude?

24. Jesus did not send the woman away as His disciples requested. The text is unclear regarding whom He *answered*. If His answer was directed at the disciples, He was reminding them about the mission for which His heavenly Father had *sent* Him.

Jesus’ primary mission before His resurrection focused on *the house of Israel*. They were like *lost sheep* without a shepherd. As a result, Jesus came as a shepherd for the people. He provided spiritual care and guidance, like a shepherd caring for sheep.

Central to Jesus’ mission as a shepherd was His preaching on the need for repentance and the presence of God’s kingdom. This mission was first revealed to the people of Israel. God’s blessing would be offered first to them. Then through them would blessing be available to all peoples.

To be clear, Matthew’s Gospel is not conveying an anti-Gentile sentiment.

Old Testament prophets proclaimed that the Messiah's mission would include Gentiles (examples: Isaiah 19:16-25; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 14:16). With a few exceptions (example: Matthew 8:5-13), Jesus' earthly ministry focused on the people of Israel. He acknowledged that His mission would reach Gentiles (see 24:14; 25:31-33; 28:19-20).

II. Second Request Matthew 15:25-28

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

25. The woman did not debate Jesus on the direction of His mission. Instead, she sought relief in a way that could only come from a desperate mother.

26. Jesus responded with a metaphor to the woman's request for help. The statement highlights that the *bread* is given to the children of the household first and foremost. It is inappropriate for sustenance to be handed out *to dogs* when it would deprive the children. Most of Scripture's references to dogs carry a negative meaning (examples: 2 Samuel 9:8; Philippians 3:2). Unlike today's house pets, dogs in biblical times were scavengers.

When we read this text today, we might feel that Jesus spoke harshly to the Gentile woman by comparing her people to dogs. But a study of the verses that follow may cause us to conclude otherwise.

In this statement, Jesus highlighted expectations regarding the order of the mission of God. Some Jewish people considered that the Messiah's mission came first and foremost for the people of Israel. Therefore it would have been inappropriate for Jesus to do anything concerning this Gentile woman.

27. The Gentile woman accepted that Jesus was sent to Israel. But she did not accept that He was *exclusively* sent to Israel, and she did not take Jesus' answer as a *no*. Instead, she built on His words, pointing out that *the dogs* did not have to take food from children in order to receive the blessing of *the crumbs*.

28a. Rarely do we read in Matthew's Gospel of instances when *Jesus* publicly commended someone for their faith. More often, Jesus challenged people for their lack of faith. It is two Gentiles—this woman and a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9)—whom Jesus proclaims to have exceptional *faith*.

We should not interpret the designation of *woman* to be one of harshness. It could be used as a term of endearment (example: John 19:26).

28b. There is another parallel point between this story and Jesus' healing of the Roman centurion's servant in Matthew 8:5-13. In both instances, the healing occurred from a distance. The woman's *daughter was made whole*, and the centurion's servant was healed (Matthew 8:13) without Jesus being in the immediate proximity of the ailing person.

Those two occasions and Jesus' healing of the son of a certain nobleman in John 4:46-54 are the only times in the Gospels when a distance healing occurred. Further, all three instances may each describe the healing of a Gentile. As such, these accounts prefigure the apostles' ministry to the Gentiles described in Acts 13:14-52; 17:1-4, 12; etc.

Involvement Learning

Faith of a Canaanite

Into the Lesson

Recall a commonly held stereotype about a group of people (farmers, city folk, dog owners, cat owners, etc.). What are the dangers of holding these assumptions?

How can these assumptions lead to the exclusion of that group?

Different groups of people have sometimes felt excluded. In today's lesson, we will read about the experience of a woman who was considered an outsider by some people.

Into the Word

Read Matthew 15:21-28 and decide whether the below statements are true or false.

1. A woman from Capernaum approached Jesus. ___
2. The woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter. ___
3. Jesus did not answer the woman with a word. ___
4. Jesus' disciples eagerly welcomed the woman into their midst. ___
5. Jesus said He was sent only to "the lost sheep" of Israel. ___
6. Jesus responded with a metaphor about dogs eating bread from children. ___
7. Jesus considered the woman's faith to be "great." ___

8. Jesus went to the woman's house to heal her daughter. ___

Key Verse

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

—Matthew 15:28

Into Life

Imagine you are writing a devotional on Matthew 15:21-28. The following are three takeaways from this Scripture:

1. *Everyone can receive God's mercy regardless of their background.*
2. *Parents sometimes risk everything for the good of their children.*
3. *God celebrates when people show great faith.*

What points of application would you write to go along with this takeaway?

Thought to Remember

Live by great faith!

Justified by Faith

Devotional Reading: John 3:1-8, 13-17

Background Scripture: Romans 3:21-30

Today's Scripture: Romans 3:21-30

I. God's Righteousness

Romans 3:21-24

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

21. *But now* builds on the thought that came before, that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). For some, the law offers a surefire way to become righteous in God’s eyes—by perfectly obeying it. But anyone with true understanding of God and the purpose of His laws knows that the law was never intended to make a person righteous and thus justify that person. If lawful action cannot justify a person, what can?

For the first time in this letter, Paul separates law from righteousness and affirms that his argument is not new; it aligns with *the law and the prophets*. This was a way to refer to all of the Old Testament. The

law was intended to make people aware of their sin, and the prophets explicitly called out the people when they became blind to their sinfulness. Paul expanded on that idea in Galatians 3:19-29, which refers to the law as “our schoolmaster,” teaching what God is like and keeping us safe until Jesus came to reveal *the righteousness of God*.

22a. *The righteousness of God* mentioned in verse 21 is here revealed to be the gift believers receive. There is some challenge in understanding the phrase *faith of Jesus Christ*. The Greek could imply that the faith is Jesus’ own, as in His faithfulness to His promises. However, the context suggests that Paul is referring to one’s faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not just a collection of beliefs but is connected to the person of Jesus Christ.

Beginning in Romans 3:9, Paul makes clear that no person is righteous. The issue at hand is not Jesus’ faithfulness, but how *all them that believe* can be called righteous (Romans 5:19). By faith in Jesus, we are eligible to and do, in fact, receive the gift of being called righteous. The contrast is with the attempt to be made righteous through works, including keeping the law. And we do well to remember that righteousness described here is being made right with God, despite our continued imperfect efforts.

22b-23. Paul likely begins an aside here. The phrase *for there is no difference* looks back to Paul's arguments about the fallenness of both Gentiles and Jews. Because both groups (which encompass all of humanity) are lost in sin and living counter to God's will, salvation for both must be attained in the same way.

The expression *all have sinned* is also found in Romans 5:12 (compare Romans 1:18-21). In the Old Testament, *the glory of God* can be used in two primary ways: to refer to an experience of God (examples: Exodus 16:10; Ezekiel 1:28) or to give God the worship that is due Him and extolling others to do the same, implicitly or explicitly (examples: Joshua 7:19; 1 Chronicles 16:28-29). In these examples, there is a sense of God's revealing himself through His glory so that people might experience Him and honor Him. The glory of God can be defined as His presence with His people (compare John 1:14). God's glory is a true and holy representation of God's character, in contrast to any idol or other falsehood. As His image-bearers, we were meant to reflect well on our Creator by living lives that reflect His holy character, His glory. Sin prevents us from accurately modeling God's glory.

24. Some have misunderstood this verse as teaching universal salvation. The argument usually ties *being justified* to "all [who] have sinned" in Romans 3:23. However, this reading cannot be preferred, as Jesus himself warned His listeners regarding eternal punishment (Matthew 7:13; 25:31-46; etc.). In keeping with other scriptural teachings—Paul's included—it is far more likely that much of Romans 3:22-23 is a parenthetical thought. This links being justified not to verse 23 but to "all them that believe" in verse 22a (compare 1:17).

When one is justified, God considers

that person righteous. There is a stark difference between works-based salvation and justification *by his grace*. In a works-based salvation, one strives as hard as one can and hopes at the very end that he or she has done enough to earn God's pardon. This suggests that salvation can be earned, like a wage, and can only be withheld if the work was not up to snuff. In contrast, justification by God's grace is given *freely . . . through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*.

Redemption for Paul's audience would call up an image of a slave being purchased out of bondage into freedom. To the Jewish recipients of this letter, redemption also meant payment to free a prisoner sentenced to death.

II. Christ's Sacrifice Romans 3:25-26

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

25. *Propitiation* can be defined as the sacrifice that God requires to forgive His people. This was a major part of the process of atonement. In Israel, sacrifices were offered throughout the year and for various purposes.

The sacrificial system was a temporary solution, made obsolete by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. When we respond *through faith*, Jesus' *blood* accomplishes the atonement we require for *the remission of sins*.

Forbearance points to God's patience. Taking into account the cycle of sacrifices necessary before Jesus' death, God's

forbearance was seen in His allowance for animal sacrifice to forgive sins, even though these only looked forward to Jesus' sacrifice. The past sacrifices were a shadow of the true sacrifice to come.

26. *At this time* refers to the time since Christ's sacrifice. God's *righteousness* and justice go hand in hand. A remarkable tension is created, then, when God, in His perfect character, desires both justice and mercy for sinners. He could not accurately be called *just* if He simply turned a blind eye to wrongdoing. Through Jesus' sacrifice, a path forward is created. Those who *believeth in Jesus* experience God's mercy and are justified when they are covered in Christ's blood and made new.

III. Human Boasting Romans 3:27-30

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

27. This verse would have resonated with Jewish Christians who heard it. They took great pride in God's having chosen them and revealed His desires through the Law of Moses. Some even boasted about their own success in following that law faithfully. If a person could earn his or her salvation, that person would have reason to boast because they measured up to the *law of works*. If anyone could boast about his adherence to the law, it was Paul.

28. This verse represents a summary of

Paul's argument to this point. Keeping *the law* does not accomplish righteousness; trying to keep the law makes us aware of our shortcomings. Justification only comes *by faith*. The works that result are evidence of faith; they are integral to a living faith, but they are not saving actions.

29. Paul frequently uses rhetorical questions to further his argument. On the most basic level, *God* created everything, and so He is the rightful God *of the Gentiles also*. Paul's Jewish audience would have agreed with this. But *the Jews* sometimes assumed that, because *God* had chosen them specially, He was opposed to all other people and chose the Jews *only*. Assuming that God's special care for Israel was an exclusionary concern for Israel ignores God's love for all people, expressed both in law and in His provision.

30. *One God* calls to mind the Shema: "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The command that follows is to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (6:5; compare Mark 12:29-30). The Shema was recited multiple times a day by observant Jews in pursuit of teaching the command and keeping it in their hearts. If there were many (real) gods, maybe there were different ways to justify the Jews and the Gentiles. But since there is only one God, He chose only one way to *justify* all people in the same way: *through faith*.

The circumcision refers to the Jews, as this was the physical sign of the covenant between God and Israel and often a badge of pride for Jews. *The uncircumcision* refers to any Gentiles. This made the practice a relatively clear-cut (pun intended) way to distinguish between the two groups. But there is only one way to the Father, no matter one's background: Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6).

Involvement Learning

Justified by Faith

Into the Lesson

What things come to mind when you think of the word “boast?”

Today, we’re going to talk about something that would be ridiculous to boast about.

Into the Word

Read Romans 3:21-30. What boast may Paul be describing?

Why does Paul say boasting is to be excluded (Romans 3:27)?

Key Verse

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
—Romans 3:22b-24

Why does the law of works not support boasting (3:23)?

What does sacrifice of atonement mean, and how does the phrase apply to Jesus (3:24-25)?

What can we do to be justified (3:22, 28)?

Into Life

How would you explain the “sacrifice of atonement” to an unbeliever?

What metaphors, comparisons, or verbal explanations can you use in a conversation?

What tangible, relational explanations might you use, accomplished over time through deed and action?

Thought to Remember

Stop struggling to earn the gift of salvation that Christ offers.

The First-Century World

by Jon Miller

During Jesus' ministry, He interacted with Jews and Gentiles. One shocking thing in the Gospels is how many stories highlight people outside of Jewish ancestry exercising faith in Christ. Jesus even told a centurion that his faith was greater than any faith Jesus found in Israel (Matthew 8:10)!

Jews and Gentiles came from very different cultural and religious backgrounds. However, the first-century church evolved from a world under Roman rule and included people shaped by Roman, Greek, and Jewish thinking. Thus, it is beneficial for us to look at how these people groups understood faith with respect to their religious and cultural heritage.

Greco-Roman

Classic Greek religion greatly influenced practice in the Roman Empire as people became interested in the worship of power. This gave rise to an appeal of magic, astrology, and the cult of the emperor. These beliefs led people to think of

the least powerful gods as demons and to believe in fate and superstition.

In Greco-Roman culture, the worship of divinities was not exclusive. Even when someone gave devotion to a pagan god, they did not deny the existence of other gods. For example, to ensure no god was lacking adoration, certain people in Athens built an altar for "the unknown god" (Acts 17:23). The apostle Paul took advantage of the open door and introduced the people to the God they didn't know (17:22-28).

Religion was a part of daily life and did not have a separation from the government in Greco-Roman society. Temples to the gods and goddesses were built from public funds, and every city had at least one patron deity (example: the temple of the "great goddess Diana" located in Ephesus; Acts 19:26-28). Religion as the personal issue of one's belief and practice was unheard of in their society. Similarly, morality was not something that people aside from Judaism and Christianity associated with religious belief.



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Judaism

Although the Greeks and Romans were hostile toward the Jewish people, the Jews enjoyed a privileged position in the empire. Because the Jewish people had offered help to the Roman rulers during the Maccabean period (second century BC), they received a pass to practice their religion without worshipping the divinities

of Rome. Moreover, they were exempted from military service and allowed to live according to their laws within their communities, including the observance of the Sabbath.

“When in Rome” the Jewish people did not “do as the Romans do.” Instead, they remained strictly monotheistic, adhering to the Law of Moses, practicing circumcision, and maintaining other rites of ritual purity. They also continued to offer sacrifices in the temple. To Jewish people, faith was based on the covenantal relationship they had as a people through Abraham.

Christianity

Christianity formed around a set of beliefs about Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Initially, Christianity was con-

sidered a sect of Judaism and enjoyed the same privileges as Jews in the free exercise of their faith. The appeal of the Christian faith was rational worship, high moral norms, monotheism, strong community, and respect for the Old Testament. This pleased some Gentiles because, unlike Judaism, it did not associate with one nationality or insist on the rite of circumcision or the observance of the Sabbath for inclusion.

These differences quickly established a line between the Christian faith and all other religions, including Judaism. In the Christian community, faith could refer to adherence to an established belief regarding Jesus (Philippians 1:27). Faith was also trusting in the covenantal relationship between God and humanity.

Significant Faith

continued from page 19

she believed that Jesus could forgive sins (7:36-39, 44-50; lesson 8). Even a Gentile woman showed faith that Jesus could heal her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28, lesson 9).

The Benefits of Faith

The quarter’s final unit investigates the spiritual benefits of having faith in Christ. Some of the recipients of Paul’s New Testament letters were of Jewish heritage. For this reason, his writings frequently contrast a person’s keeping the Law of Moses with a person’s faith in Christ.

Paul argues that people do not receive justification through keeping the Law of Moses. Instead, justification and righteousness come through faith (Romans 3:21-28, lesson 10). As an example,

it was Abraham’s faith, not his actions, that were counted to him as righteousness (4:13-25, lesson 11).

A person expresses faith after they hear the good news of Christ (Romans 10:14-17, lesson 13). Believers enter the community of God’s people by confessing sin and believing that Jesus is Lord. As a result, believers can rejoice! Because of our faith in Christ, we celebrate a relationship of peace with God (5:1-5, lesson 12). We were once adversaries of God, but by our faith, we have received the ultimate benefit: becoming children of God. This new identity is good news for all who would believe.

What steps can you take to strengthen your faith in God? Who will you invite to be an accountability partner in this regard?

Counted as Righteous

Devotional Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

Background Scripture: Romans 4

Today's Scripture: Romans 4:13-25

I. True Heirs of Abraham

Romans 4:13

13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

13a. Paul does not exclude the Jewish people from God's concern, nor does he minimize the importance of the Torah (the Law of Moses). But Paul builds on the insight that *the promise* predates *the law* since *Abraham* lived before Moses and the giving of the law. Thus, it follows that the promise was the foundation of the law rather than the other way around.

The idea that Abraham would inherit *the world* comes in part from Genesis 12:1-3, which describes Abraham's offspring as a blessing to the world. This was sometimes interpreted as meaning that Abraham's family would literally govern all the world. But we see that Jesus' followers—Abraham's true *seed*—inherit the world.

13b. *Faith*, which biblically might be defined as trust in God and His ability and intention to keep His promises, can characterize any person, not only those who were given the law. God is the God of all, both Jews and Gentiles. The relationship between God and humans rests on something deeper than the law, the thing that characterizes one group but

not the other. That deeper reality is faith in Jesus. God chooses to credit us with righteousness when we come to Him through such faith. *Through the righteousness* that only comes from God's gift to us, we also stand to inherit the world as promised to Abraham.

II. Supporting Arguments

Romans 4:14-25

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he

considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

14. Salvation comes from God's *promise* since God saves "the ungodly" (Romans 4:5; 5:6). Nothing that we can do can save us.

The Law of Moses leads one to love God and fellow human beings. Paul does not mean that Jews or Gentile converts who keep *the law* cannot also trust God. But what was promised because of faith still required faith; law-keeping could not substitute for trusting God.

15. At the same time, *the law* has limitations. No one can violate a law that does not exist. The law could define sin's precise contours and clarify what effects it has, but it cannot save. It *worketh wrath*, that is, it provokes God's anger when humans break His law. Since God's wrath is justified and necessary to bring about justice, the law's function to notify us of boundaries serves a spiritually useful purpose.

16. It refers to the promise (see Romans 4:13). This verse makes two interrelated points. First, God's saving work extends to all who will receive it in *faith* by trusting

God's promises and counting on God's mercy, justice, and protection. The Law of Moses was a gift from God for previously enslaved people so that they could experience a life of real freedom. Its many provisions tended toward building a community of mutual support and justice.

Second, the promise to bless the world (Genesis 12:1-3) extends to all who imitate *Abraham* in trusting God. Descent from the patriarch involves not ancestral DNA but a similar faith-filled life. God's work was bigger than the law could accommodate, and God's *grace* extends to both Jews and Gentiles who trust Him.

17. Verse 17 offers evidence for the previous verses' assertions by quoting Genesis 17:5. Part of a story of renewed promises to Abraham, this statement reveals the enormous consequences of the then-soon-to-be-fulfilled promise of a child, Isaac (see Genesis 21:1-7). The promise extends even to the raising of *the dead*. This happened metaphorically for Abraham and Sarah, who were long past childbearing age, and literally for Jesus as "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The entire story of Israel and the church is one of unimagined possibilities coming to life thanks to God's saving work.

The final clause alludes to the story of God's creation of the world, through which nonexistent things became realities. God's creative work did not cease long ago but continues until all things are made new. Creation and redemption form two sides of the same coin because both come from God's love and proceed toward the well-being of the creature.

18. Genesis repeats the promises to Abraham three times (Genesis 12, 15, 17). Paul moves backward from the third to the second occurrence, quoting Genesis 15:5 with *so shall thy seed be*. Paul interprets the quoted text in two ways simultane-

ously. First, the promise of offspring came to Abraham, and it was fulfilled. And second, the offspring would be like Abraham, full of hope for God's redemptive work.

Hope in the Bible is never simply wishful thinking. It is the expectation that something is to occur that is neither a given nor impossible.

To hope *against hope* means that Abraham had no natural basis for believing he and Sarah could have a child. The child-birth required a miracle, and the couple trusted God to provide that without knowing how it would occur.

19. Paul ignores indications of Abraham's doubts in Genesis 15:2-3 and his ill-conceived attempt to "help" God by impregnating Hagar. We might be encouraged that such major lapses in judgment and trust did not nullify Abraham's faith.

20. This verse restates the ideas of the previous sentences but adds two dimensions. First, it clarifies what Abraham believed when he trusted God's *promise*. The grammar of the Greek text serves to emphasize the promise that Abraham trusted rather than his act of believing God. God's action precedes and forms the basis for Abraham's faith.

Second, this verse also proposes that Abraham's trust equaled glorifying *God*. Words of praise, no matter how beautiful, do not really bring honor to God unless the one who is praising lives in the hope that God's promises will be fulfilled.

21. Here concludes the analysis of Abraham's trust as confidence in God's ability and willingness to act benevolently for the benefit of human beings. The verse also describes an aspect of God's promises: they are not idle words.

22. Paul refers here to Genesis 15:6. The word translated *imputed* also is translated elsewhere in this chapter as "counted" (Romans 4:3, 5) and "reckoned" (4:4,

9-10), which clarifies that God accepted Abraham's faith as righteous action. God *imputed to Abraham righteousness*, not because Abraham had done good deeds or avoided evil, but because he had staked his life and his family's future on God's promises starting in Genesis 12.

23. If God was to keep the promise to Abraham that he would become the ancestor of many nations, then the act of imputing righteousness to him based on faith must extend to others who do the same thing. Otherwise, God would be a respecter of persons, a player of favorites.

24. When does God reckon us as righteous? The verb tense of the underlying Greek could indicate a future time, such as the last judgment. But the Greek may also indicate something just about to happen or a certainty with uncertain timing. Perhaps Paul does not mean to be overly precise, as there are mysteries about the future that no one knows. Or perhaps he signals the fact that justification occurs now *and* later as God continuously sustains a relationship with those who trust in His promises. This latter interpretation is in keeping with what can be referred to as the now/not yet of God's kingdom. We are *now* part of God's kingdom, but we are *not yet* experiencing its fullness.

25. Paul's language echoes Isaiah 53:6, 12, which anticipated that the suffering servant would be handed over to His enemies to make "intercession for the transgressors." Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant was a key text for early Christians in understanding Jesus not as a tragic figure or a victim of state violence, but as the Messiah who died on behalf of others. His death was necessary to pay the price for sins, but it would have been incomplete without a resurrection. Jesus joined in the suffering brought about by sin in order to free from sin's power those who trust God's promises.

Involvement Learning

Counted as Righteous

Into the Lesson

In your own faith walk, do you find it easy to trust God? Why or why not?

Today's study looks at how trustworthy God's promises are.

Key Verse

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

—Romans 4:20-21

Into the Word

What was Abraham's righteousness based on? Read the following passages: Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15-16; 21:1-21; 22:1-19; and Romans 4:13-25.

What is Paul's view of Abraham and his faith?

What does the rest of Scripture show about Abraham's faith?

What doubts did Abraham have, and what did he do in the face of those doubts?

How did Abraham's actions ultimately show that he trusted God's promises?

Into Life

Who is a person who exhibited faith in the face of doubt or other challenges?

What action did this person take in response to a specific hardship?

How did God demonstrate His continued faithfulness and righteousness in that circumstance?

What are ways you can celebrate God's grace with loving and faithful action?

Thought to Remember

Justification by faith is not an abstract idea but a reality for life.

Reconciled to God

Devotional Reading: Acts 2:37-47

Background Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

Today's Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

I. Effects of Justification

Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

1. Because God declares us accepted based on our *faith* in the Messiah, Jesus, this trust yields certain effects. Justification is not simply an accounting trick God makes. It begins a transformation of life.

We includes both Jews and Gentiles, with God showing no partiality to either. Because of God's work to keep the ancient promises to Abraham, everyone can have the kind of *peace* of which Paul speaks. The concept of peace had political implications for first-century subjects of Rome. By a mixture of force and political maneuvering, the Roman Empire had built the *Pax Romana* ("the Roman peace"). In

contrast to peace enforced at the point of the sword, God offers genuine reconciliation of all people to himself through Jesus' faithful obedience. Paul exhorts the Romans to have peace among themselves. Peace with God leads to (or should lead to) peace among followers of God when exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit.

2a. *Access* to God's *grace* does not derive from an accident of birth or even from doing good deeds. It comes *by faith* in God's gracious offer of mercy. When *we stand*, we take confidence in God's promise, building our lives on it. Because Jesus trusted God, those who follow him may do so as well.

2b. The word *glory* draws on an old biblical theme with several dimensions. Some texts use the word to refer to God's overwhelming presence among human beings (examples: Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11; Ezekiel 1:28). The Psalms use the term to refer to God's splendor in Heaven, which is accessible in controlled ways to humans on earth (examples: Psalms 24:8-10; 29:9; 79:9). God's glory also appears when saving humans (example: Isaiah 40:5).

The final example is especially fitting here. The glory of God comes to light in the saving work of Jesus in his crucifixion and resurrection. God's glory is also evident in the life of the church and at the final judgment, when all things will

become subject to God and open to His full presence. For this reason, we *rejoice* in expectant *hope* that God has forgiven us and given us new life now and in Heaven.

3. The word translated “glory” here is translated “boast” in 2 Corinthians 10:8, 13; etc.; that is the sense here as well. With this word, Paul opens the possibility that Christians might celebrate, not only while experiencing pleasant things but also *in tribulations*. These words do not refer to mild annoyances or everyday problems but to devastating experiences. Tribulation can result from doing evil, though this is not the sense here. Instead, we think of tribulation that confronts the faithful who overcome it by the power of Christ’s love and patience. Such hardship is an opportunity for God’s grace to be revealed.

4. The chain of words in verses 4-5 does not imply a straightforward progression from one virtue to another. Rather, the apparent progression reveals the close relationship among the qualities Paul lists. A willingness to endure hardship strengthens a person’s *experience* and makes it possible to *hope* in a better future. In context, the translation *experience* is difficult. When we consider that the same Greek word is translated “proof” in reference to Timothy’s character (Philippians 2:22), we can conclude here that experience is not the neutral event itself but the positive effect it can have on forming one’s character. Experience should be understood in the positive sense of a high level of integrity that has developed through difficulties.

5. Paul draws on an old biblical theme according to which God vindicated His people’s *hope* through their restoration to a right relationship with Him. Those who have hope in God’s saving work, even if they experience social isolation or persecution, still have God’s approval. Therefore, they cannot be shamed in any lasting way.

God’s love is the source of honor. The Greek verb translated *shed abroad* often refers to the way *the Holy Ghost* comes to followers of Jesus. Here, God’s *love* is shed abroad, indicating the abundance that believers receive.

II. Effects of the Cross Romans 5:6-11

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

6. Many scholars believe this verse quotes a saying that was circulating in the Roman church. The main argument for this position is that elsewhere Paul speaks of weakness as a positive attribute rather than as something to be overcome.

The evidence for Paul’s claim that suffering borne faithfully produces spiritual growth comes from the life of *Christ* himself. Christ suffered patiently and voluntarily in part because He knew what would be accomplished through His death. His followers may imitate Him in that action.

Paul describes the prior status of all Jesus-followers as both weak and *ungodly*.

Christ did not die for the righteous but for the wicked. We were helpless to overcome death and evil until God's presence among humankind overcame those dangerous forces. God's mercy extends to those who need it most.

7. The distinction between a *righteous man* and a *good man* is a bit unclear. Probably the latter term refers to a benefactor, or more generically, someone who has done tremendous good for someone else. One might die for such a person as an act of appreciation, loyalty, or simple nobility of heart.

8. The motives described in verse 7 do not apply to Jesus. Christ's death does not fit the normal pattern of brave, noble deaths for a good cause or as acts marking people as superior to others. Such deaths do occur in the ordinary world, and while they often deserve praise, Jesus' death is not comparable to theirs. It far exceeds them: *Christ died for* those who had done nothing for Him and never could. Paul's point is not found in the difference between a righteous person and a good one but instead between those for whom some person might die and those for whom Jesus died.

9. *Much more* introduces an argument from the most difficult task to one less difficult. God has overcome the power of sin and death. Since Jesus has already done the hard work of saving us from the power of sin and death, He can do the much easier work of saving us from God's *wrath* against unrighteousness. Wrath in this context refers to the last judgment, in which the true distinctions between good and evil become unmistakable to all. In that moment of truth-telling, the truth of God's mercy shown in Christ's death will win through. Those who trust God's promises to save through His Son will see their hope become a reality.

The substitutionary death of Jesus

paid the price for our sins, a price we could never pay on our own. Rather, by entering the world of sin and death that humans experience, God in Christ overcame those great evils and ended the estrangement that separated humanity from our creator. The end of that alienation from God came about because of His actions, not ours. We can be at peace with God. We are new creatures; we wear a new name, and we have a new destiny.

10. The final two verses of this section build on the idea of salvation in two ways. First, Paul asserts that Christ's death has made possible our reconciliation *to God*. While Paul did consider humans as active participants in the process, here he emphasizes God's work rather than human responses. It is puzzling that Paul includes himself among God's (former) enemies since he had always obeyed God with a sincere heart even when he badly misunderstood God's desires. Yet this understanding reflects his conclusion that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23) and that keeping the Law of Moses could not reconcile one to God without God's mercy.

11. Salvation has tangible results in one's attitude toward daily life. The word translated *joy* is also translated "boast" in Romans 2:17, 23, and that is the sense here. Verse 3 raised the possibility of celebrating even the worst parts of life as opportunities to experience God's mercy. But here, the rejoicing focuses on the mercy itself. Those who trust God celebrate the fact that God's mercy extends to all, not just to themselves. They see themselves as part of the grand story of redemption from the power of evil and share that joy with others. Most importantly, their joy comes *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. That is, He is the author, inspirer, and basis of their words of celebration.

Involvement Learning

Reconciled to God

Into the Lesson

Define the words *peace* and *truce*.

Which word best describes reconciliation? What other words can be added to describe reconciliation?

Reconciliation between God and us required His action on our behalf. Today's lesson will explore what our reconciliation required and what it means for us.

Into the Word

Read Romans 5:1-11. Who is responsible for initiating the reconciliation?

What occurs in the process of reconciliation, and how is reconciliation achieved?

What is the goal of the reconciliation, or what does it lead to?

What happens if the reconciliation is not achieved?

What is the relationship like before reconciliation?

Key Verse

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
—Romans 5:1

Into Life

How would you describe life *before* you were reconciled to God?

How would you describe life *after* you were reconciled to God?

Thought to Remember

We have peace with God because Christ paid sin's price for us.

Who Has Believed?

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Background Scripture: Romans 10:1-21

Today's Scripture: Romans 10:1-17

I. Paul's Prayer

Romans 10:1-4

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

1. Praying for God's salvation *for Israel* was probably habitual for Paul. His concern for his people—including family and friends—was reason enough to pray for the nation. The Scriptures he long had studied modeled praying for deliverance for Israel from its various foes. And there was an expectation, found particularly in the prophets' writings, that the nation would be restored after suffering for their sins. Paul's prayers expanded to include that his people would turn to Christ and find eternal salvation in Him.

2. This verse and the next summarize Paul's understanding of the state of his Jewish contemporaries. Paul did not sug-

gest that his fellow Jews were all pursuing evil ends, because that was clearly not true. Jews who did not follow Jesus still desired to follow God. But, Paul asserts, they misunderstood the trajectory of God's work and how their own Scriptures pointed to Jesus as their Messiah. Paul does not dismiss *zeal* for God as insignificant; he knew from personal experience that misdirected zeal could be turned to God's purposes. Still, his people's zeal without *knowledge* of Christ prevented them from recognizing that God's long-anticipated provision for deliverance of His people (and indeed all nations) had finally been revealed.

3. Paul has argued that *God's righteousness* consists of extending salvation to all on the basis of trust in the work of Christ. This verse echoes Romans 2:17-24, in which Paul criticized the attempt to make Jews out of Gentiles. Attempts to come to God on the basis of anything other than Christ, and especially on the basis of any human achievement, fail. An approach to saving the Gentiles that tried to compel them to keep the Law of Moses (the Torah) neglected the deeper reality that the relationship to God always depends on faithful trust, not on the works themselves.

4. The word translated *end* can have the sense of "the ultimate goal" in Greek, as it does here. The coming of the *Christ* and His activity in revealing God's salvation to

all human beings was always the goal of *the law*. And the Law of Moses itself pointed Israel to the work of God, as opposed to the law's existing for its own sake. Paul did not expect the abolition of Torah but the completion of God's promises. Those who trust God's work through Jesus have fulfilled the Torah's overarching objectives.

II. The Word of Salvation Romans 10:5-13

5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above;)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

5. Here and in Galatians 3:12, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5: *The man which do-*

eth those things shall live by them. Paul did not oppose the Jewish people keeping *the law*, and he accepted the idea that its instructions can guide a person to a wiser, more faithful life. In this way, Jews who kept the Torah in faith did *live by them* and could experience the limited *righteousness* of striving to accomplish God's will.

6-7. Paul next quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-13: *Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? . . . Who shall descend into the deep?* These verses are part of God's promise that He would extend mercy to Israel after the nation experienced the consequences of breaking covenant and turned to Him in repentance and faith.

8. In Deuteronomy *the word* is nearby, entering into the heart of those who love God with all their "heart, . . . soul, . . . and . . . might" (6:5). The Lord asserted His laws are neither hard to understand nor difficult to carry out (30:14), though people's experience showed that perfect adherence was not possible.

The word of faith that comes to believers, both Jews and Gentiles, is the trustworthy message that Paul has been preaching.

9. Paul links the confession of faith from one's *mouth* with the belief in one's *heart* and thus to the commitments of the whole person. To confess *Jesus as Lord* is a radical commitment. Anyone who can sincerely make that confession with their mouth and heart will see a changed life over time.

To *believe* that God has raised Jesus *from the dead* also means to trust that God has overcome the power of death itself. Salvation involves both the present and the future. We can understand being *saved* as a shorthand for the entire relationship that the redeemed person enjoys with God. The effects begin in our Spirit-led lives now and will culminate in everlasting life in Heaven.

10. The prior verse followed the se-

quence confess/believe. But this verse follows a more intuitive order, with the commitments of *the heart* leading to the words of *the mouth*. When the heart and the mouth align in acknowledging the saving work of Christ, it becomes possible to experience both *righteousness* and *salvation*.

11. Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16, which is part of a promise that God would rebuild Zion after its destruction. Paul may have read that text metaphorically so that the promised “stone” laid in Zion became a reference to the Messiah, although Paul does not spell out this connection.

12. This verse returns to the thesis statement of the book in Romans 1:16-17. The theme of God’s richness also appears in 2 Corinthians 8:9, which describes the work of Christ in terms of the foregoing of wealth. The image in both texts is of a king who bestows goods on subjects whenever they need them. By calling Jesus *Lord over all*, the verse emphasizes His close relationship to the Father and the universal scope of His kingdom.

13. This verse quotes Joel 2:32, which is part of a passage about one instance of God’s rescuing Israel. Both Joel and Paul understand God as one who answers the sincere cries of people longing for help. Because Jesus is “Lord over all” (Romans 10:12), *whosoever* may *call upon* Him.

III. Preaching Leads to Faith Romans 10:14-17

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the

gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

14-15a. How do people know to *call on* God? The answer becomes a sustained explanation of the nature and purpose of Christian preaching. The act of proclaiming the gospel ultimately comes from the God who sends out proclaimers, not from their own concerns or abilities. Paul always understood his own mission as following God’s leading. Here, we see a logical progression: a preacher must be sent so that an audience can hear the gospel and come to faith.

15b. The evidence Paul offers for God’s calling messengers to preach is a quotation of Isaiah 52:7. That text is part of a long discussion of the *glad tidings* to ancient Israel: God was ending the suffering of the Babylonian exile. The exiled people would soon return home and rebuild the ruined cities, especially Jerusalem.

16. Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1, which continues the account of the Suffering Servant, noting the disbelief of many.

In spite of that disbelief, Paul’s job, and the job of all Christ-followers, is to keep celebrating the good news and to live lives that reflect our faith in Jesus. After all, we might plant the seed and water it, but God gives the increase. Our responsibility is not the outcome but our faithfulness to report the gospel.

17. There is a contrast between verses 16 and 17. Both draw on an idea from the Old Testament prophets regarding how their audience would react. Verse 16 emphasizes the negative side of unbelief, while verse 17 understands the power of *the word* to be so great that it leads people to trust *God*. Paul was confident that both Jews and Gentiles would learn to trust God once they understood the gospel.

Involvement Learning

Who Has Believed?

Into the Lesson

Is the following statement true? Why or why not? If not, tweak as desired to highlight the differences between a mythic hero and a real-life hero.

Heroes in mythology conquer impossible odds with supernatural abilities, while real-life heroes conquer great odds through the extraordinary application of natural human abilities.

God does not require us to be heroes to live according to His will. Our lesson focuses on the good news of the hero who accomplished what we could not do for ourselves.

Into the Word

Read Romans 10:1-17. Match up the following Old Testament references with its use in today's Scripture passage.

- Leviticus 18:5 _____
- Deuteronomy 30:12 _____
- Deuteronomy 30:13 _____
- Isaiah 28:16 _____
- Isaiah 52:7 _____
- Isaiah 53:1 _____
- Joel 2:32 _____

Key Verse

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

—Romans 10:9

What is Paul's overall argument?

How is Paul using each quotation to bolster his argument?

What steps does Paul describe in the progression of salvation?

What is the difference between the actions of the heart and the mouth?

Into Life

Consider the progression Paul describes in verses 14-15 (hearing, believing, preaching). Based on these verses, what is your personal responsibility?

Thought to Remember

Confess and believe that Jesus is Lord!

March 4-10

- Mon, Mar. 4
- Tue, Mar. 5
- Wed, Mar. 6
- Thu, Mar. 7
- Fri, Mar. 8
- Sat, Mar. 9
- Sun, Mar. 10

March 11-17

- Mon, Mar. 11
- Tue, Mar. 12
- Wed, Mar. 13
- Thu, Mar. 14
- Fri, Mar. 15
- Sat, Mar. 16
- Sun, Mar. 17

March 18-24

- Mon, Mar. 18
- Tue, Mar. 19
- Wed, Mar. 20
- Thu, Mar. 21
- Fri, Mar. 22
- Sat, Mar. 23
- Sun, Mar. 24

March 25-31

- Mon, Mar. 25
- Tue, Mar. 26
- Wed, Mar. 27
- Thu, Mar. 28
- Fri, Mar. 29
- Sat, Mar. 30
- Sun, Mar. 31

- James 1:2-12
- James 1:13-18
- Psalm 139:1-12
- Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24
- 2 Corinthians 11:22-33
- 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
- 2 Corinthians 13:1-10

- 2 Timothy 4:1-8
- Psalm 67
- Mark 5:1-2, 6-7, 11-20
- Acts 9:10-22
- Isaiah 1:16-20
- 1 Peter 2:4-12
- 1 Peter 3:8-17

- Deuteronomy 28:1-14
- Titus 2:1-8
- Proverbs 1:1-9
- 2 Corinthians 5:1-11
- 2 Timothy 2:8-21
- Acts 6:1-6
- Acts 6:7-15

- Mark 14:1-9
- Exodus 14:10-20
- Exodus 14:21-31
- Mark 14:17-26
- Mark 15:25-39
- Psalm 22:1-11, 28-31
- Mark 16:1-8

April 1-7

- Mon, Apr. 1
- Tue, Apr. 2
- Wed, Apr. 3
- Thu, Apr. 4
- Fri, Apr. 5
- Sat, Apr. 6
- Sun, Apr. 7

April 8-14

- Mon, Apr. 8
- Tue, Apr. 9
- Wed, Apr. 10
- Thu, Apr. 11
- Fri, Apr. 12
- Sat, Apr. 13
- Sun, Apr. 14

April 15-21

- Mon, Apr. 15
- Tue, Apr. 16
- Wed, Apr. 17
- Thu, Apr. 18
- Fri, Apr. 19
- Sat, Apr. 20
- Sun, Apr. 21

April 22-28

- Mon, Apr. 22
- Tue, Apr. 23
- Wed, Apr. 24
- Thu, Apr. 25
- Fri, Apr. 26
- Sat, Apr. 27
- Sun, Apr. 28

- John 1:37-42
- Jeremiah 17:12-17
- John 4:4-18
- John 4:19-29, 39-42
- Psalm 66:1-5, 13-20
- Isaiah 6:1-8
- Luke 5:17-26

- Acts 10:1-15
- Isaiah 42:1-12
- Malachi 1:10-14
- Colossians 3:1-11
- Zechariah 8:18-23
- Luke 3:1-14
- Luke 7:1-10

- Luke 7:11-18
- Psalms 92
- James 5:12-20
- Micah 7:7-20
- Psalm 86:1-7, 11-17
- Romans 8:1-16
- Luke 7:36-50

- 1 Kings 17:8-16
- 1 Kings 17:17-24
- 4:24-30
- Psalm 61
- Psalm 20
- James 4:1-10
- Matthew 15:21-28

April 29–May 5

- Mon, Apr. 29 Psalm 35:1-7, 22-28
- Tue, Apr. 30 Psalm 112
- Wed, May 1 Acts 3:12-26
- Thu, May 2 John 3:1-8, 13-17
- Fri, May 3 Psalm 5
- Sat, May 4 1 John 1:1-2:2
- Sun, May 5 Romans 3:21-30

May 6–12

- Mon, May 6 Matthew 20:1-16
- Tue, May 7 Genesis 13:14-18
- Wed, May 8 Genesis 15:1-6
- Thu, May 9 1 John 2:12-17
- Fri, May 10 Psalm 32
- Sat, May 11 Romans 4:1-12
- Sun, May 12 Romans 4:13-25

May 13–19

- Mon, May 13 Isaiah 26:1-11
- Tue, May 14 Isaiah 40:1-11
- Wed, May 15 Acts 2:1-4, 14, 16-24, 36
- Thu, May 16 Acts 2:37-47
- Fri, May 17 Genesis 33:1-15
- Sat, May 18 Psalm 29
- Sun, May 19 Romans 5:1-11

May 20–26

- Mon, May 20 Joel 2:28-32
- Tue, May 21 Romans 9:14-16, 25-33
- Wed, May 22 Romans 11:1-4, 17-27
- Thu, May 23 Deuteronomy 30:11-20
- Fri, May 24 Mark 5:35-43
- Sat, May 25 Isaiah 52
- Sun, May 26 Romans 10:1-17

In the Word

Your weekly Sunday school time will be enriched when you come to class each week prepared. One aspect of good preparation is continual contact with the Word of God. Of course, Bible reading is more than preparation. It is a vital link with the Father. Coupled with prayer, it is the most important item on your daily agenda.

There are a variety of Bible reading plans available. We offer this one because it is designed to enhance your weekly Bible study of these lessons with an adult class.

Your devotional time can be enriched if you add to these Bible readings a time of prayer and meditation. The quarterly booklet *Devotions*® combines these same readings with a meditation, daily Scripture verse, a hymn, and prayer thoughts. *Devotions*® is available from your local Christian bookstore or from David C Cook (order no. 3629322; order no. 2629522 for large print).

REMOVE THIS PAGE, FOLD, AND KEEP IN YOUR BIBLE
FOR REFERENCE.

February 26–March 3

- Mon, Feb. 26 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
- Tue, Feb. 27 Numbers 16:12-13, 23-34
- Wed, Feb. 28 Genesis 18:20-22; 19:1-5, 15-17, 22-25
- Thu, Feb. 29 1 Peter 2:13-25
- Fri, Mar. 1 Genesis 5:18-24
- Sat, Mar. 2 Jude 3-16
- Sun, Mar. 3 Jude 17-25

Quarterly Quiz

Lesson 1

1. Jude tells his audience to remember what had been foretold by the apostles. T/F. *Jude 17*.

2. Jude says to save others by snatching them from what? (fire, pit, persecution) *Jude 23*

Lesson 2

1. Believers should examine themselves to see whether they are in what? (the right, the faith, the church) *2 Corinthians 13:5*

2. Paul commands believers to “live in _____.” *2 Corinthians 13:11*

Lesson 3

1. Responding to evil with an equal evil is acceptable. T/F. *1 Peter 3:9*

2. Always be prepared to give an answer regarding the reason for your _____. *1 Peter 3:15*

Lesson 4

1. The false witnesses claimed that Stephen spoke blasphemy against what things? (Choose two: the Sadducees, this holy place, the law, Elijah) *Acts 6:13*

2. The face of Stephen appeared like “the face of an _____.” *Acts 6:15*

Lesson 5

1. Peter had gone with the women to the tomb to help them roll away the stone. T/F. *Mark 16:3*

2. The women were told that Jesus was going to what region? (Judea, Galilee, Samaria) *Mark 16:7*

Lesson 6

1. Jesus forgave the man’s sins before the man stood up. T/F. *Luke 5:20*

2. The Son of Man has _____ to forgive sins. *Luke 5:24*

Lesson 7

1. The centurion sent soldiers to Jesus to ask for healing. T/F. *Luke 7:3*

2. The centurion demonstrated a great _____ not found in Israel. *Luke 7:9*

Lesson 8

1. The ointment was stored in a container made of what material? (amethyst, agate, alabaster) *Luke 7:37*

2. The woman refused to pour perfume on Jesus’ feet. T/F. *Luke 7:46*

Lesson 9

1. The woman called Jesus the “Son of _____.” *Matthew 15:22*

2. Jesus told the woman that she demonstrated great _____. *Matthew 15:28*

Lesson 10

1. “For all have sinned and fall short of the _____ of God.” *Romans 3:23*

2. A person is justified by faith and the requirements of the law. T/F. *Romans 3:28*

Lesson 11

1. Where there is no law, there is no what? (transgression, transfiguration, testimony) *Romans 4:15*

2. Christ was raised to life for “our _____.” *Romans 4:25*

Lesson 12

1. Because of justification by faith, believers have _____ with God. *Romans 5:1*

2. At the right time, Christ died for the _____. *Romans 5:6*

Lesson 13

1. Christ is the culmination of the _____. *Romans 10:4*

2. Paul quoted from an Old Testament passage that declared the beauty of what body part that proclaims good things? (feet, lips, hands) *Romans 10:15*

Jesus Includes “Outsiders” in Luke’s Gospel

Jesus and Outsiders

- Jesus eats with outsiders (5:27-32)
- Jesus heals the servant of a centurion (7:1-10)
- Jesus teaches on neighborly mercy (10:25-37)
- Jesus and the tax collector (19:1-10)
- Jesus and the crucified criminal (23:40-43)

Jesus and Women

- A woman anoints Jesus’ feet (7:36-50)
- Jesus heals a bleeding woman (8:40-48)
- Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath (13:10-17)

Jesus and Children

- Jesus heals a boy with a spirit (9:37-43)
- Jesus and the little children (18:15-17)

Jesus and the Unclean

- Jesus heals a man possessed by a spirit (4:31-37)
- Jesus heals a man with leprosy (5:12-16)
- Jesus heals a man with paralysis (5:17-26)
- Jesus heals a man possessed by demons (8:26-39)
- Jesus heals ten men with leprosy (17:11-19)
- Jesus heals a man with blindness (18:35-43)

