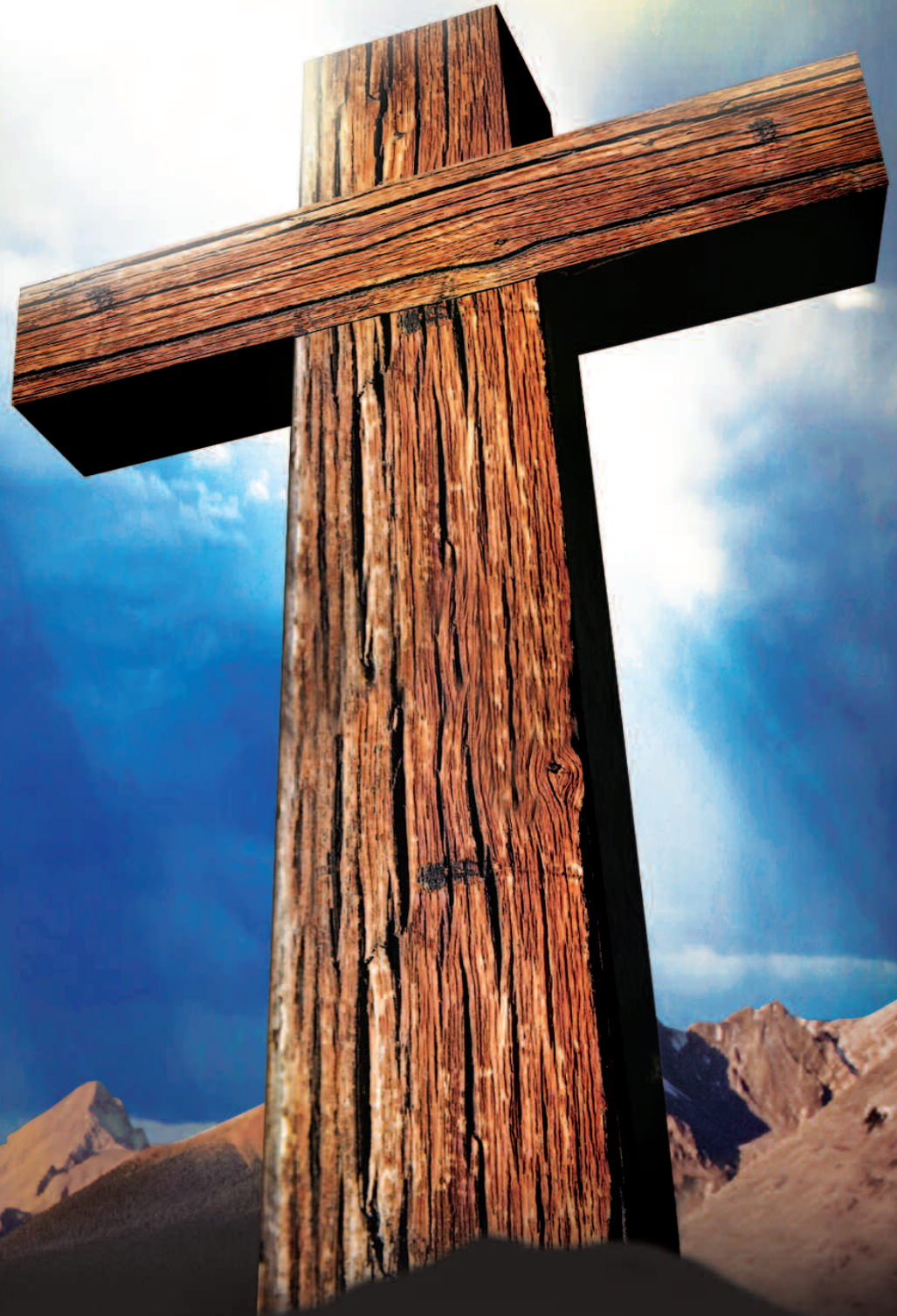


# THE POWER OF THE CROSS

SEVEN SERMON/DISCUSSION OUTLINES  
PREPARING FOR EASTER



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that lift up and encourage the body of Christ—  
because we love him!



## THE POWER OF THE CROSS

*Seven Sermon Outlines to Help God's People Prepare for Easter*

Rev. Barry Keurulainen

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# THE POWER OF THE CROSS



*It's all about me!* Has any generation in all of world history believed this more deeply than our generation? Has there ever been a greater need for Christian leaders to challenge this frenzied self-focus? Has there ever been a deeper need for God's people to set aside some quiet time to ponder the power of the cross?

First, the power of the cross breaks into our culture and into our individual lives. It invites us to abandon our focus on self. It demands that, instead, we see and worship God in all his glory—the glory of his love, his humility, his holiness, his power, and his victory. The cross brings hope and the healing power of forgiveness to people prone toward self-centeredness and self-worship. It brings a new focus—a focus on serving others, and the meaning such service in Jesus' name always brings.

Second, we ponder the power of the cross because we often feel so personally powerless against multiple outside forces, changes, and challenges. We live in an age in which most things around us seem totally out of control. But in the shadow of the cross, we find peace. Our Savior has defeated sin and death! He has conquered our worst enemies and destroyed our worst fears. No matter what happens, we are safe. Jesus will bring us safely through life here on earth and on into life forever in his Father's house.

*The Power of the Cross* materials will help you share the freedom Christ's cross delivers in an encouraging, clear, powerful way. This product line includes value-priced materials for every member and visitor:

- † The *Power of the Cross* devotion booklet, designed for daily use by families and individual members of your congregation. It will help members and visitors think more deeply about what Jesus did for them on the cross as they prepare their hearts to celebrate his resurrection victory.
- † The *Power of the Cross* corded bracelet is a great reminder for teens and young adults that the power of the cross is Christ's work of salvation.
- † The *Power of the Cross* activity book and free pencil provide kids ages 7–12 with an engaging format for discovering what Christ's work on the cross means in their lives today and through eternity.
- † Younger children can learn the meaning behind several of Jesus' names, along with the Easter story, when they hear the free devotions that accompany the *Power of the Cross* activity magnet. The six pieces form a cross when they are assembled.
- † Visitors will be delighted with the meaningful gifts you provide them when you distribute the *Power of the Cross* jumbo bookmark with pen or laminated magnet. Either gift will put in their hands a reminder of the real message of Easter.

Additionally, each sermon outline in this booklet is accompanied by a set of questions suitable for sparking discussion among the adults in your congregation who hear it. These may be used in the worship setting itself, if your worship is more informal, or immediately following the service, if that's more appropriate in your setting. Or you may want to use the questions in small-group Bible study or cell groups that meet during the week. There are questions written specific to the devotion book, as well as questions written specific to the sermon. (You'll find these questions at the end of each sermon.)

As you look at the questions based on each week's devotions, you may want to make them available for individual, family, or group use during the week. You might also consider combining them with the sermon outline questions, customizing them for your members and visitors. (These questions, too, appear toward the end of each sermon.)

It's *not* all about us. It's all about Jesus! It's about his powerful cross and the life that flows to us from it!

God bless your Easter preparation and celebration!



# THE POWER OF THE CROSS

## SERMON ONE 2 Corinthians 5:14–17



Belle Fourche, South Dakota. Have you ever been there? Twenty miles outside of this small town stands a small, circular marker with the word *center* inscribed on it. It marks the spot of the official geographic center of the United States. Belle Forche snatched this honor away from Lebanon, Kansas, in 1959, after Hawaii and Alaska became states.

In an article entitled “In the middle of Nowhere, A Nation’s Center,” Dan Berry of the New York Times wrote:

. . . a wind-tattered American flag, flapping at the top of a silvery pole that rises from the Dakota moonscape like the claim stake of some disoriented astronaut. A hand-scrawled sign propped against a barbed-wire fence provides confirmation; though the absence of a souvenir stand or even a snow-cone booth would suggest otherwise, this remote spot is, in fact, the declared geographic center of the United States. . . . Who knows why the centers of things matter—the centers of cities, of states, of countries—but they do. (New York Times, June 3, 2008)

A barren, yet somehow beautiful emptiness! And there, just there, lies the center of a nation.

There is another center, a much more important one, itself once as lonely and barren as Belle Fourche. That place is Calvary, the spot where the cross of Jesus Christ one stood. It is a place to pause and to reflect on truths larger—much, much larger—than one’s self.

Paul reflects on this center when he writes:

*For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

2 Corinthians 5:14–17

For Paul, the cross stands at the center of all humanity—for all need a Savior. “One died for all,” he writes. But Paul goes further. The cross stands at the center of all history. Because of the cross and what Jesus did for us there, “the old has gone, the

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## SERMON ONE

CONTINUED . . .



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new has come!” The death of Jesus and his resurrection marked a turning point in the history of the world. In fact, we divide human time at the cross: B.C.—before Christ; A.D., *Anno Domini*—the year of our Lord. Jesus’ cross changed everything!

The cross has a power all its own—the power to draw humanity to the Savior who died there for us, the power to center all history around itself. On a more individual level, the cross centers the lives of people who have lost direction and whose lives are out of control.

The cross made this kind of impact on Paul. He writes, “The love of Christ compels us.” The word for *compel* in the original language carries a sense of being driven on a course from which you cannot deviate. No other options exist. There’s no other course possible.

But listen carefully! “The love of Christ compels us!” Not Paul’s love for Jesus, but Jesus’ love for Paul left him with no choice but to follow. What Christ had done on the cross overwhelmed Paul. Because of Christ’s love, Christ’s sacrifice, Paul follows freely—not under threat of force, not because the Holy Spirit turned a switch, transforming him into some kind of robot. No, that is not the way with Christ’s love. But when we have experienced the power of the cross, when we have seen the love that bled and died on Calvary, what other option would we consider but to follow Christ?

Do not think that this faith of Paul’s is some passing fancy. He says, “Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced.” Conviction! The love of Christ compels us with nothing less than conviction. Someone once described belief as “something you hold onto” and conviction as “something that takes hold of you.”

Too many times, perhaps, we root our faith in sentiment, in our feelings, rather than in our convictions. Could this be true because sentiment is easier, because sentiment is not as challenging or as costly as conviction? The cross is more than mere sentiment! It displays the deep conviction of God, the lengths to which he was willing to go to win us.

Conviction always translates into actions that provide tangible evidence. Listen to Paul: “So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.” We cannot come to the cross and then leave, unchanged. The power of the cross impacts our relationship with God, to be sure, but it also changes our relationships with other people. How can someone come to the cross, truly see the love that Jesus showed there, and then leave, still holding grudges and nursing bitterness? Answer: We can’t!

The powerful cross of our Lord calls us to see people differently. What’s more, it gives us the patience and love we need to follow that call. Do you struggle to forgive or to love someone in your life? Let the love of Christ compel you!

## SERMON ONE

CONTINUED . . .



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In the power of his cross, Jesus calls us to serve as his ministers of reconciliation. We might back away from this calling, saying, “I cannot do that. I just don’t have the love or forgiveness within me.” And you don’t! But the good news is that our Savior will work in us and through us, despite our lack of resources. By the power of his cross, our Lord fills us with the love and forgiveness we need. Like empty vessels, we need only allow him to pour the precious treasure into us. It begins with a simple prayer: *Lord, I cannot do this on my own. I will be the vessel, but you must provide the love and compassion that I offer.*

The sacrificial love of Jesus radiates from his cross. It compels us to live transformed lives, and it works that transformation in us. It turns faith from mere sentiment to true conviction so that we see everyone around us through the lens of the cross and then relate to them in Christlike compassion and self-sacrificial love.

When this happens, an unbelieving world sees the glory of God in the face of Christ—and some in that world will want to learn more. May God grant that in the weeks ahead as we prepare our hearts to celebrate our Savior’s resurrection victory.

*To God Alone Be the Glory! Amen!*

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### Special Prayers

# THE **POWER** OF THE **CROSS**

## Questions to Accompany Sermon One



### The Power of the Cross

1. Today we heard about Belle Fourche, the geographic center of the United States.
  - What “centers” have you visited?
  - Why do you think people find and mark centers like Belle Fourche?
2. In what ways is the cross of Christ, our Savior, the “center” . . .
  - of human history?
  - of the human race?
  - of our lives?
3. In 2 Corinthians 5:14–17, the apostle Paul writes, “Christ’s love *compels* us . . .,” and then goes on to elaborate.
  - What are we compelled to do?
  - Whose love does the compelling? Why does this emphasis matter?
4. What one key point will you carry away when you leave today? Explain why.
5. What will you ask Jesus to do in and through you in response to what you’ve heard?



# THE **POWER** OF THE **CROSS**



## Questions to Accompany Devotion Book for Week One

### **The Power of the Cross Reveals the Glory of God in Christ**

1. We talk often in churches about “the glory of God.” Yet it may be we seldom stop to ask what this phrase means. As you think about “the glory of God,” . . .
  - Where do you see it in the creation around you?
  - Where do you see it in other believers?
  - In what ways is the cross of Jesus the ultimate demonstration of God’s glory?
2. The Westminster Catechism tells us that the chief end of human beings is “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” In what way are each of these the same thing?
3. What evidence from our culture can you cite to show that people by nature tend to place themselves at the center of their lives? As you feel comfortable, share times when you are most likely to do this, too.
4. Look back at the devotion titled “Glory in the Flesh.” Which of the “mysteries” from the bulleted list evoke the most awe and wonder in you?
5. At the end of his life, Jesus said, in essence, to his Father: Mission Accomplished.
  - How could he say this truthfully?
  - How does that comfort you as you think about your own self-centeredness and the sins that keep you from fully glorifying God and enjoying him?
6. As you look back on the devotions for this week, which challenged or encouraged you the most? What made that reading so compelling or thought-provoking?
7. Based on everything you have read and thought about this week, what would you like to say to Jesus in response? Work together to generate a list; then pray through it together.

# God's Answer to Our Whys

## SERMON TWO John 11:1–44



*When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”*

*John 11:4*

Death is not a subject that most of us handle well. It makes us feel uncomfortable, awkward, helpless. One reason for our discomfort is that despite all our advancements in technology, we have not been able to conquer it. Death wins every time. At least, that’s how it seems on the surface. God alone knows how many times the harshness of death has caused a human being to want to scream out, “Why?”!

The situation surrounding our text today confronts us with that very harshness. A dear friend of Jesus is sick, Lazarus by name. His two sisters send for Jesus, whose response is more than curious. “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days” (John 11:5–6).

Why?

Later, when Jesus arrives on the scene, he is faced with the harshness of the sisters’ confusion and anger. “Lord, . . . if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (11:21). Both sisters speak the same words, but their posture seems quite different. Martha runs to Jesus to confront him, engaging him in a kind of debate. A little later, Mary comes out of the house to find him and falls at his feet, weeping.

Martha wants something intellectual to steady herself; she wants to know that Jesus is in control. Mary is in need of something emotional; she needs to know that Jesus cares. Jesus meets them both at their point of personal need.

To Martha, he offers a statement of truth and then poses a question for her to ponder: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (11:25–26).

To Mary, he offers the emotional support she needs: “When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, . . . he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (11:33). Then comes the shortest verse in the Bible, but one packed with meaning and compassion: “Jesus wept” (11:35).

Why?

Why would he cry? Surely he knew what was about to happen! Yet, standing there before the sealed grave of Lazarus, Jesus wept. He wept for Mary. He wept for Martha. He weeps for you and me and for every human being who stands in tears

### Notes



## Notes

beside the grave of a loved one. Jesus knew firsthand, as only a true human being could know, the harshness of death and the pain death brings.

Why?

The question hangs there like a slow-moving curve ball. Why did Jesus not come sooner? Why did he not arrive in time to prevent this tragedy?

Jesus does not always answer our whys, but he does answer this one. When he first learned of Lazarus's illness, he commented, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (11:4). Later, he adds to this explanation, telling his disciples, "For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe" (11:15).

Is this why Jesus delayed? The "glory of God"? How does that answer our whys?! In times of crisis it is important to consider the lens through which we view things. Someone has said, "God is never late." He's seldom early, either. God's clock is set to a different time zone than ours—an eternal time zone.

He sees things from the perspective of eternity. We see things from the perspective of the here and now. One of my favorite quotes comes from *The Little Prince*: "All things essential are invisible to the eye." From our very limited perspective, we are bound to miss much—or even most!—of what really matters. But from the power of the cross we gain a different perspective.

When the harshness of death (or perhaps, instead, the harshness of life in our fallen world) confronts you, what do you see? Do you see the presence of chaos or the presence of Christ? Do you focus on what feels good at the moment or on what will bring glory to God eternally?

As Jesus stood before Mary and Martha, so he stands before us promising: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (11:25–26).

Notice that Jesus did not say, "I *bring* resurrection and life," but rather, "I *am* the resurrection and the life." In our Savior's presence, death has no power. In Jesus' presence, through the power of the cross, the grave has lost its grip on us, and death has lost its sting. If the grave could not hold on to Jesus, neither will it hold anyone who is "in Jesus," by faith.

Did you notice that Jesus answers our "why" questions by answering the "who"? He asserts, "I am the resurrection and the life." In essence, he says, "This is who I AM. Is that enough?" As you face the harshness of death, as you ask your own whys, is it enough to know your Lord and to return again and again to his promise that through faith in him, death is no longer death?

"Do you believe this?" That is what Jesus asked Martha. It is the question he puts before you and me right now, too. Our answer to that question will speak volumes to all our whys, just as it has spoken to believers from every time, every place.

## SERMON TWO

CONTINUED . . .



As we close, I invite you to pray with me a portion of a prayer attributed to St. Patrick, a Christian missionary of the fourth century: Notice how he relies on the “who” to help answer the whys—and the hows—of life:

*I bind unto myself today  
The power of God to hold and lead,  
His eye to watch, his might to stay,  
His ear to hearken to my need.  
The wisdom of my God to teach,  
His hand to guide, his shield to ward,  
The Word of God to give me speech,  
His heavenly host to be my guard.*

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

*I bind unto myself the name,  
The strong name of the Trinity;  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One, and One in Three,  
Of whom all nature hath creation,  
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation!  
Salvation is of Christ the Lord. Amen.*

## Notes

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## Special Prayers

# THE **POWER** OF THE **CROSS**

## Questions to Accompany Sermon Two



### God's Answer to Our Whys

1. Are you someone who asks a lot of whys? Why or why not?
2. Human beings often ask their most anguished whys as we confront death. Most times, though, we try not to think too much about our own mortality. What makes death such a difficult subject to talk about (or even think about)?
3. Both sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, said the same thing to Jesus: "Lord, . . . if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). Jesus answered each sister differently.
  - How did he answer Martha? Mary?
  - What accounts for the difference?
4. Why did Jesus cry in John 11:35? How do his tears comfort you?
5. How do Jesus' words in verse 25, "I am the resurrection and the life," help us live with the why questions that will go unanswered this side of heaven?
6. What one key point will you carry away when you leave today? Explain.
7. What will you ask Jesus to do in and through you in response to what you've heard?



# THE POWER OF THE CROSS



## Questions to Accompany Devotion Book for Week Two

### The Power of the Cross Reveals the Glory of God's Holiness in Christ

1. As you look back on the devotions for this week, which challenged or encouraged you the most? What made that reading so compelling or thought-provoking?
2. How does God's Law "shut us up," so to speak? What does it keep us from saying to ourselves, to others, or to God himself? How does the power of the cross open our mouths again? What can we say as a result?
3. The author of "Falling a Little Short" asserts: *"The perfect life God's Law demands makes a 20-story vertical leap look easy by comparison."*
  - What facts does he marshal to support this statement?
  - Do you believe him? Explain.
  - How has God addressed our "shortfall," our "unholiness"?
  - Many see what God did to address our shortfall as the core of the Christian faith. Do you? Why or why not?
4. "A promise is a promise!" Which of our Lord's promises bring you the sweetest comfort and peace?
5. The devotion titled "God Does Not Wink" stressed the power of the cross to bless. When have you experienced that power? Share, as you can comfortably do that.
6. Based on everything you have read and thought about this week, what would you like to say to Jesus in response? Work together to generate a list; then pray through it together.

# The Woe and Wow of Worship

## SERMON THREE

Luke 5:1–11



*Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”*

*Luke 5:5*

They had fished all night. That sentence takes on deeper meaning when we understand that for them fishing meant more than simply casting a line and sitting back, waiting for the bobber to move in response to a fish striking. Instead, “fishing” meant throwing out wet, heavy nets, one tiring cast after another, all night long. Their catch after all that? Zero.

Then, just as they pulled onto shore, exhausted, an itinerant preacher asked to use their boat as a pulpit. It made sense; the human voice carries well over water. And so, even though they were likely exhausted, they put out into the water off shore one more time. When the preacher finished speaking, he issued an invitation to the fishermen: “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4).

Were they skeptical? Simon’s words hint at that, and we can understand their skepticism. What would a carpenter know about fishing? After a fruitless, frustrating night, casting out into the deep water—where fish seldom lurk—would likely yield only more of the same: nothing!

So Simon said what everyone else was thinking: “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.” Still, then, he added, “But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (5:5). The King James Version translates this, “Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”

“Nevertheless”—this is the cry of faith uttered by those who have come to trust in what God can do when he asks his people to take on seemingly impossible tasks. God asks, and his faithful children respond, “Nevertheless . . .”

“Because you say so, Lord, I will do it.”

The disciples did let down the nets and—immediately—those nets were full! Oh, were they full! In fact, the fish filled more than one boat that day, filled them to the point that they began to sink. Not a bad day’s catch!

Picture it! The fish are flopping around in the boat, water is coming in over the sides, and suddenly Simon looks directly at Jesus. The lights come on. Simon falls down at Jesus’ feet and says, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (5:8).

Doesn’t this strike you as a bit odd? Simon realizes that he is in the presence of God—and immediately invites Jesus to leave! Have you ever wondered why Simon did not plunge over the side and swim to shore himself?

### Notes

## SERMON THREE

CONTINUED . . .



### Notes

This was a moment of great amazement and great fear. It was what you might call both a “wow moment” and a “woe moment.” Simon was not the first to experience a moment like this. Others before him had encountered similar “woe” and “wow.” Remember the Old Testament prophet Isaiah?

Isaiah 6 details a vision in which God sweeps the prophet up into his presence. Isaiah finds himself in heaven, looking directly at the Lord—at heaven’s High King—seated there on an indescribably majestic throne. The train of his robe fills the temple. (In that culture, the longer the train, the more powerful the King. This King is powerful indeed!) Angels surround the throne, calling out “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). The temple shakes to its foundations.

And so does Isaiah. He cries out in verse 5, “Woe to me! I am ruined!” The word *woe* in the Hebrew of the Old Testament is a strong word. Usually, it refers to someone under God’s curse! Isaiah connects his “woe” to the Hebrew word for “ruin.” This word means literally “to be undone” or “to come unraveled.”

In the presence of God’s holiness, all of Isaiah’s sinfulness suddenly became apparent to him. Imagine if right now, in this hour of worship, everything you had ever done wrong suddenly came flooding back into your memory, into your consciousness. The weight of that guilt would be overwhelming. The fear would be enormous.

Peter. Isaiah. Two different stories. Two different people. Two different circumstances. Yet, what they share in common is an experience with holiness. Separated by centuries, they nonetheless reacted in the same way—with a “woe” and a “wow.”

One other thread connects all these accounts. Grace. In the temple with Isaiah, we see an angel touching our lips with a coal from the altar to cleanse us. In the boat with Simon, we hear our Lord’s clear words of pardon and possibility: “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men” (Luke 5:10).

Both Isaiah and Simon moved from *wow* to *woe* and back again to *wow*. By the grace of God, both received a new purpose for their lives. Cleansed from their guilt, they were also commissioned. Both were changed forever.

That is the nature of worship. In worship, we see God’s glory and grace revealed, and it changes us. We cannot worship God in all of his holiness, in all of his glory and grace, without being changed.

Jesus took Simon Peter into the deep water so that Simon might come to understand himself more deeply and so that he would get to know God better—in both his holiness and his grace. Our Lord wants to do the same for you and me. He calls us to venture out into the deep. There, he waits for us to voice our own “nevertheless” and to step out in obedient faith. In so doing, we learn much about ourselves and our Savior.

## SERMON THREE

### CONTINUED . . .



Still today, worship invites us into moments of both *woe* and *wow*. Christian churches exist to lead God's people into God's presence so that he can confront us with our sin and assure us of his promised forgiveness, life, and peace. In God's presence, we experience the power of the cross as it reveals the glory of God's holiness and the wretchedness of our sin and as it leads us to a deeper trust in our Lord's forgiving love for us, his grace toward us. Our lives change in those moments of *woe* and *wow*.

Where, today, is God calling you to venture into the deep? Where is he inviting you to experience the *woe* of your own condition so that you might then know of the *wow* of his wonderful grace?

### Notes

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### Special Prayers

# THE **POWER** OF THE **CROSS**

## Questions to Accompany Sermon Three



### The Woe and Wow of Worship

1. Put yourself in the boat with Peter and the other fishermen on the morning Jesus went fishing with them. Hear the waves lap against the hull. Feel the morning sunshine as it begins to warm your back. See the sand on the beach 100 or so yards away. Hear the oars creak.
  - What about that morning feels most ordinary? Most unusual?
  - If you had been Peter, would you have let down the nets one last time? Explain.
  - As you watch the fish accumulate in the bottom of the boat do you feel amazed, frightened, delighted, curious, or ????
  - Why do you suppose Peter asked Jesus to leave? What dynamics were at work in this request?
2. Describe the experience of Isaiah as the Lord calls him into service as a prophet.
  - In what ways are Isaiah's and Peter's experiences different?
  - How are they alike?
  - Where do you see the grace of God at work in both incidents?
3. Think about the "deep water" into which Christ may be calling you right now.
  - Describe that "water."
  - What makes you inclined to say your own "nevertheless" as you "let down your nets" in response to Christ's call?
  - What reluctance might you feel? How will Jesus make it possible for you to overcome it?
4. As you listened today and talked with other people just now, where did you see yourself? What "woe" did you experience? What "wow"?
5. What one key point will you carry away when you leave today? Explain.
6. What will you ask Jesus to do in and through you in response to what you've heard?



# THE POWER OF THE CROSS



## Questions to Accompany Devotion Book for Week Three

### The Power of the Cross Reveals the Glory of God's Grace in Christ

1. The readings for this week were each based on a contrast. Which of these challenged or encouraged you the most? What made that reading so compelling or thought-provoking?
2. This week's first devotion points out the paradoxes or contrasts seen in the cross of our Savior.
  - How many can you list?
  - Do you see some the author did not include? If so, describe them.
  - Why didn't early Christians use a cross as their primary symbol?
  - Why do we?
3. John the apostle tells us the reason behind his writing the letter we know as 1 John today: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).
  - Tell about a time in your life when you longed to *know* that you had eternal life.
  - When do doubts most easily arise for you?
  - What might God want to do to help you in these times?
4. Look back at the devotion "Christ Was Forsaken, We Are Adopted." In what ways is a human adoption like God's adoption of us? In what ways is it different—and even better?
5. In what ways has Jesus' death made you rich?
6. Based on everything you have read and thought about this week, what would you like to say to Jesus in response? Work together to generate a list, then pray through it together.

# No Strings Attached

## SERMON FOUR Mark 10:17–22



*As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

*Mark 10:17*

When someone promises you something “with no strings attached,” what does that person mean? Today this expression conveys the idea that the offer comes without hidden conditions. The figure of speech actually goes back to early days in the cloth-selling industry. A small flaw in a fabric would be marked by a string so that it could easily be spotted. If a piece of fabric had “no strings attached,” buyers could assume it had no flaws.

Our Savior’s love comes with no strings attached. No flaws mar his perfect love for us. And he looks for the same from us in return—an unblemished love. Today’s Scripture from Mark 10 talks about this. Listen to the dialog between a rich, young man and Jesus (vv. 17–22):

*As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

*“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”*

*“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”*

*Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

*At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

This young man was trying so hard to do what was right. The problem, though, is that there were “strings attached” to his obedience. There were flaws in his love. Actually, there were two flaws: his focus on his own outward behavior and his focus on his possessions.

The man’s first question betrays the first flaw in his thinking. He asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Deep down, he thought he was already good enough, and if not yet quite living up to God’s standard, at least capable of successfully addressing his shortcomings. He focused his attention on how he looked on the outside.

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Outwardly, he was upright and moral. He did not see the sins that lurked within. After Jesus recited several of the Commandments, the young man responded, “I have kept all these things.” Don’t snicker too loudly! Jesus did not. Jesus loved him!

Still, this man had concluded that his relationship with God was dependent on what he himself did. Like so many others, even many people today, he was blind to the truth. The Bible puts it bluntly: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). How much plainer could it be? We are unable to do anything to help ourselves. Dead is dead. Corpses cannot get up and get a glass of water for themselves.

Apart from Christ, there is not one ounce, not one percentage of positive spiritual impulse within us. We are free to choose what we desire, but our desires remain in bondage to our evil impulses. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Paul asks in Romans 7:24. Earning eternal life by our own efforts is impossible.

This leads us to the rich man’s second flaw. His first flaw lay in his focus on himself; his second flaw, in his focus on his possessions. Jesus wanted this rich, powerful, self-sufficient young man to repent of commitments to his material goods and to depend totally on Jesus for life—life with him here on earth and life with him after this life ends. This called for drastic action! “Go,” Jesus told him. “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Mark 10:21). Only in doing this would the rich man discover that security and hope come from Jesus, and not from material possessions. Jesus is the source of the life that is really life.

Salvation is the gift of God. It comes to us without any cost on our part. But there is a cost in discipleship. Fishermen leave their boats and nets. A tax collector leaves his lucrative tax table. Men and women leave family and walk away from friends. Jesus’ call to follow is not one more obligation to add to our daily routine. Rather, it is a call to surrender all of our obligations, treasures, and loyalties to the one who says, “Follow me.” Jesus is not looking for admirers, but followers. You can admire from a distance, yet remain relatively unaffected. Followers, on the other hand, have their lives turned upside down.

This is what Jesus was getting at when he spoke about the camel and the needle. After the young man left, Jesus’ disciples found themselves confused by what they had just heard. Listen to Mark 10:23–27. (*Read it.*)

There is some ridiculous humor in this. Various explanations have been advanced to explain this figure of speech, but it’s just as possible that Jesus simply had in mind the object he names—a needle used by a seamstress and the kind of camel that carries large burdens through the desert. Try getting a camel through a needle’s eye! The thought would be laughable, were it not that our eternal life itself hangs in the balance. True freedom can come only from outside us, from the work of God on our behalf, the work of God in creating faith and the heartfelt desire to honor our Savior with our lives.

## SERMON FOUR

CONTINUED . . .



The rich man walked away, sad and spiritually impoverished. So far as we know, he never caught on.

But what about you? Jesus is calling you and me just as he called the rich, young man. How will you respond? Following Jesus, relying on him, living with him as our focus—it may all sound so impossible. And it is—with us! But not with God. The power of the cross enables us to follow.

Ironic isn't it, that an instrument of death gives us life? But that is exactly what the cross does. It reveals the glory of Christ's love. As it does, Jesus clothes us in the garment of salvation and the robe of his own righteousness—no strings attached.

### Notes

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### Special Prayers

# THE POWER OF THE CROSS

## Questions to Accompany Sermon Four



### No Strings Attached

1. Tell about a time you found yourself agreeing to a relationship, event, or opportunity that had “strings attached.” How did you feel? What did you learn?
2. Review together where the expression “strings attached” came from. In what ways is this origin fitting?
3. The young man whose story we read in Mark 10 had attached strings to his love for God and his obedience. In fact, we can identify two strings.
  - String #1—his “what must *I do*” thinking. What makes this a flaw? When does this view of your relationship with your Savior snag and flaw your own discipleship?
  - String #2—his focus on his possessions. What makes this a flaw? When is this kind of focus most likely to snag and flaw your own discipleship?
4. The young man in Mark 10 walked away.
  - Why might he have done that?
  - Have you ever done that or been tempted to do that?
  - How did Jesus bring you back?
5. How is the power of the cross at work in your life today to keep you from wandering?
6. What one key point will you carry away when you leave today? Explain.
7. What will you ask Jesus to do in and through you in response to what you’ve heard?



# THE POWER OF THE CROSS



## Questions to Accompany Devotion Book for Week Four

### The Power of the Cross Reveals the Glory of God's Love in Christ

1. Which devotion from this week made you think the hardest? Which evoked the deepest worship? Talk a bit about that.
2. In what ways are each of Jesus' last seven "words" or statements, miracles?
3. Look back at the devotion titled "Jesus' Love for His Family."
  - What would have made our Lord's words to Mary and John difficult?
  - When do you find it hardest to show love and compassion toward the members of your biological family? your faith family?
  - How do our Lord's words to Mary and John regarding Mary's care after Jesus' death challenge you? How do they comfort you?
4. The author concludes the devotion "Jesus' Love for Sinners" with this question: *"Where in your life is the apparent powerlessness of God a sign of his love for you?"* Share your thoughts with your group.
5. What details of Jesus' final prayer on the cross (Luke 23:46: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit") do you find especially significant? Why?
6. What is your favorite Bible verse? Why?
7. Based on everything you have read and thought about this week, what would you like to say to Jesus in response? Work together to generate a list; then pray through it together.

# A Stone's Throw

## SERMON FIVE John 8:1–11



New England has a number of stone walls, including one known as “Spite Wall.” It measures eight feet across—so wide that it will allow four men to walk on top, side by side! Two farmers built it, and they did so because they wanted nothing to do with each other. That is a lot of spite! But it’s not the first time stones have been used in spite.

One day, Jesus was teaching in the temple when, suddenly, a great commotion arose. Some Pharisees dragged a woman into the temple courts. They had caught her in the act of adultery. Probably half-naked, certainly humiliated, she lay there at Jesus’ feet. The Pharisees accused her in no uncertain terms and without regard for her dignity: “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (John 8:4–5).

The woman was nothing more than a pawn in their scheme to accuse the Savior. To be sure, her adultery was sinful. The Pharisees, however, were using her simply as a means of getting to Jesus. He was the real object of their anger and outrage. If they had been seeking justice, they would have brought along the woman’s companion in sin. Since they had caught her “in the act,” they had certainly also caught her partner!

This scene reminds me of a scene from Camelot. Queen Guinevere is caught in adultery and sentenced to death. Waiting for the order of execution to arrive and the execution itself to begin, King Arthur’s nephew Mordred gleefully taunts him. “Arthur, what a magnificent dilemma! Let her die, your life is over; let her live, your life’s a fraud. Which will it be, Arthur? Do you kill the queen or kill the law?”

That is the dilemma. Echoing Mordred, the Pharisees ask Jesus, “What will it be, Jesus? Do you kill the woman or kill the law?”

Please understand, that this is not simply a story; it’s not simply theoretical. It’s *our* story, yours and mine! It’s God’s dilemma as it applies to you and me! Does God suspend his Law, ignoring his character of justice and holiness? Or does he allow us—the children he loves—to die eternally in hell, to live in exile, forever away from his presence?

Seemingly, Jesus’ enemies have him caught between a rock and a hard place. But consider what he does next: “Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger” (John 8:6). People have speculated for centuries about what he wrote. It is an intriguing mystery. Still, it may be less important to know *what* he wrote and more important that *he used his finger* to do it—and that he wrote *twice*! Could that have been the focus of this moment?

There was another time that God used his finger—twice—to write. Remember? Moses brought two tablets of stone up to the top of Mount Sinai, and God wrote the

### Notes



## Notes

Ten Commandments on them. Then, after Moses angrily smashed those first tablets because the people broke God's Law in worshipping the Golden Calf, God used his finger to write the same text a second time and on a second set of tablets. Might it be that, in using his finger—twice—Jesus was delivering an object lesson (a children's sermon, in essence) to the Pharisees, reminding them of the true Judge, the true Lawgiver?

In any case, adding to his point, Jesus said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Jesus was not ignoring the woman standing before him. Rather, he was attending first to her accusers. They wanted to talk about the woman; Jesus wanted to talk about them. They focused on the law as it related to her behavior; Jesus focused on God's Law as it related to their hearts. *She* was not denying her sin; *they* refused to admit they had any!

Jesus stooped down to write a second time. One by one, the Pharisees left. Then Jesus looked up to ask:

*"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*"No one, sir," she said.*

*"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

*John 8:10–11*

Throughout this story we hear echoes of other words from John's Gospel—John 3:16–17:

*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

The power of the cross looms over the entire life of Jesus, revealing the glory of God's grace to people like this woman and to people like you and me.

All of us will find ourselves somewhere in this story. Maybe we are the ones ready to throw stones of anger, hatred, or jealousy because of an unforgiving spirit. If so, it's time to drop those stones! Or perhaps you see yourself in the woman, feeling the shame and weight of your sin. If so, it's time to look to Jesus for comfort and help. He will not turn you away. He has come to save you, not to condemn you. This woman found forgiveness at Jesus' feet and you will, too. The power of his cross overwhelms the power of your sins to condemn or shame you in his presence!

Do not deceive yourselves! This account does not treat sin lightly. Our Lord's forgiveness does not de-fang the Law of God. The cross does not set it aside. In a sense, the Pharisees were right. Sin demands judgment. Human sin creates a debt that only death can pay.

## SERMON FIVE

CONTINUED . . .



But Jesus paid that debt! He paid it for the woman, and he paid it for you and me. The only thing standing between the woman and the stones of her execution was Jesus himself! And the only thing standing between you and eternal death is—yes, Jesus himself. The sacrifice he offered on the cross has destroyed the power of sin and death.

The story is told of two men looking at a painting of a chess game. The one man, a chess champion, commented, “Something about this bothers me.” After a while, the chess master said to his friend, “We must locate the man who painted this piece. We must tell him he must either change the picture or change the title. This painting is called ‘Checkmate,’ but the title is all wrong. The king still has one more move.”

The Pharisees treated the woman as merely a pawn in their battle with Jesus. But the King had one more move. It involved a stone—another, much bigger stone than the stones that threatened her. It was the stone the angel would roll away from the door of Jesus’ tomb.

When you find yourself between a rock and a hard place, take joy in knowing that your King always has one more move. Go in peace, and sin no more!

## Notes

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## Special Prayers

# THE **POWER** OF THE **CROSS**

## Questions to Accompany Sermon Five



### A Stone's Throw

1. Think about the story of the Spite Wall.
  - Did it surprise you or not? Explain.
  - Have you ever encountered a similar story? Tell about it (omitting names, of course!).
2. In today's account from John 8, the Pharisees acted in spite toward Jesus, using the adulterous woman as a pawn in their scheme. These were deeply "religious" people. Share what you know about where their hatred and spite came from.
3. The Pharisees offered Jesus a clear choice: kill the woman or "kill" the law by ignoring the demands of justice. Jesus created a third option; he let himself be killed for the woman's sins—and for ours!
  - In what way was our Lord's option surprising? In what way was it not?
  - Tell about a time Jesus' love and forgiveness surprised you a lot, just as it must have surprised the woman in the story.
4. Where do you see yourself in this account?
  - As one of the Pharisees, a person holding stones of anger, jealousy, or the desire to even the score with someone?
  - As the woman, a sinner feeling the shame and weight of your guilt?
  - As the disciples, followers of Jesus amazed at your Lord's wisdom and compassion?
  - As one of the bystanders, someone who often goes about your business and overlooks the miracle of God's love happening around you?
5. Recap the story of the chess game in the painting.
  - In what way is it true that our King always "has one more move"?
  - How does that comfort you?
6. What one key point will you carry away when you leave today? Explain.
7. What will you ask Jesus to do in and through you in response to what you've heard?



# THE **POWER** OF THE **CROSS**



## Questions to Accompany Devotion Book for Week Five

### **The Power of the Cross Reveals the Glory of God's Humility in Christ**

1. In what ways does the cross of our Savior reveal a humble majesty?
2. In what ways does the cross of our Savior reveal a courageous surrender?
3. In what ways does the cross of our Savior reveal a lowly holiness?
4. In what ways does the cross of our Savior reveal an ugly beauty?
5. In what ways does the cross of our Savior reveal a simple glory?
6. Which of these contrasts spoke most powerfully to your heart this week about . . .
  - your sin?
  - your Savior's love?
  - your life and changes that your Lord would want you to make?
7. Based on everything you have read and thought about this week, what would you like to say to Jesus in response? Work together to generate a list. Then pray through it together.

# The View from the Donkey

## SERMON SIX Luke 19:28–44



### Notes

One episode of the classic TV show *M.A.S.H.* was filmed from the viewpoint of the patient. A throat wound prevented the soldier-turned-patient from speaking. Watching the show through this lens enlightened viewers and sparked a lot of creativity on the part of the writers, too.

Many of us have, no doubt, considered Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday from any number of angles. But have you ever thought about the "view from the donkey" that day? What did Jesus himself see? He certainly took in every detail! The Gospel of Mark tells us, "Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve" (Mark 11:11).

But let's back up to catch the context. As morning dawned that day, Jesus was in Bethany. A few days earlier, he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Needless to say, the area was buzzing with the news. Nearby, in Jerusalem, the city was beginning to swell with people arriving to celebrate the Passover, and we can guess that few new arrivals missed hearing all the talk about Lazarus and Jesus.

Soon, the Lord and his disciples would themselves travel the couple of miles from Bethany to enter Jerusalem for the Passover. This time however, Jesus would enter in a way that he had never done before. He called two of his followers and gave them these instructions:

*Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" tell him, "The Lord needs it."*

*Luke 19:30–31*

One has to wonder if the crowd, seeing Jesus riding the donkey, heard echoes of the prophet Zechariah in the shouting all around them.

*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!  
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and having salvation,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*Zechariah 9:9*

Whether they made that connection or not, we can have little doubt that by riding on the back of a donkey, Jesus was intentionally making a statement. A King does not



## Notes

enter a city on foot! On the other hand, kings rode on stallions when they arrived in triumph to trumpet their military conquest of a region or city. Jesus rode a donkey because he came in peace.

King Jesus entered Jerusalem with a rag tag “army” of fishermen, shepherds, day laborers, and farmers. He came in peace, riding a beast of burden. The procession began a couple of miles outside the city. The closer it came to the city gates, the more it took on the air of a celebrative parade. With every step, the excitement and energy grew. The people, taken by Jesus’ miracles—and especially the miracle of Lazarus’s escape from death—had been waiting for Jesus to take the throne. Seeing his arrival, the city erupted in cheers and anticipation.

Matthew says of this moment, “The whole city was stirred” (Matthew 21:10). Everyone on the streets cheered in wild celebration. But we read this description of our Lord’s response: “As [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it” (Luke 19:41).

I am not sure that anyone noticed Jesus’ tears at first, but at some point, someone must have seen them. Jesus’ weeping involved more than a tear or two. The original language gives the sense that his entire body shook with emotion. This was a deep, soulful sobbing.

In the midst of his tears, he said of the cheering crowds, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (Luke 19:42–44).

Jesus wept because he could see the shadow of death and doom hanging over his people. He could hear their pain and cries and groans, pain and cries and groans they would experience when the Roman army besieged the city not many decades later. He could see the faces in the crowd, people who blessed him now, but those who would surely curse him at Calvary in just a few days. Jesus knew all too well the truth that John would later document: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:11).

Jesus also wept over Jerusalem because he could hear the cries of those who would be lost forever, those who would live away from the presence of God forever, damned eternally, because they rejected their only Savior.

Jesus still weeps today. He weeps for Jerusalem. He weeps for our nation. He weeps for our city/town and for every single person who rejects him and the forgiveness and love he gives through the power of his cross, to all who believe.

For whom do you weep? We could not be there in that procession to greet our Lord as he entered Jerusalem, but we can join him today. We can praise him with our

## SERMON SIX

CONTINUED . . .



hosannas and weep with him over those who are lost. In our weeping, we pray that everyone will see in the power of the cross the glory of Jesus' humility. Our Lord will not force himself on anyone. Yet, he invites us today to join in his procession.

Then, one glorious day, we will join a much larger multitude, one no one can number, waving our palm branches in joy and love:

*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:*

*"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

*Revelation 7:9–10*

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

## Notes

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## Special Prayers

# THE POWER OF THE CROSS

## Questions to Accompany Sermon Six



### The View from the Donkey

1. Read back through Luke 19:28–44. As you do, look for what Jesus would have seen, heard, and experienced. In other words, try to capture the “view from the donkey.”
  - What did you discover by reading the account through this lens?
  - In what way(s) did it change your understanding of our Savior’s thoughts and motives?
2. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he came in peace and on a lowly donkey, not a powerful or prancing war horse. What drove the crowd’s excitement into a fever pitch, despite his humble entrance?
3. The city could not have been more excited, more jubilant. But Jesus could not have been sadder! Why did Jesus weep? Work together to list all the reasons you can.
4. None of Jesus’ followers that day wept with him. Few of his followers today weep over those who live apart from him and his amazing love.
  - What blocks our tears?
  - How might the power of the cross unblock them?
  - Would that be a good thing or not? Explain.
5. Read Revelation 7:9–10. As you do, think ahead to the next time Christ’s people will wave palm branches in worship of our King. To what do you most look forward as you anticipate that day?
6. What one key point will you carry away when you leave today? Explain.
7. What will you ask Jesus to do in and through you in response to what you’ve heard?

# THE **POWER** OF THE **CROSS**



## Questions to Accompany Devotion Book for Week Six

### The Power of the Cross Reveals the Glory of God's Victory in Christ

1. As you look back on the devotions for this week, which challenged or encouraged you the most? What made that reading so compelling or thought-provoking?
2. Look back at the devotion titled "Dissolved." What do you understand by the word *Tetelestai*? What makes this word so meaningful or powerful?
3. In what way was Jesus' death on the cross a "disarmament treaty"? This treaty was unilateral—completely one-sided. Explain.
4. Colossians 2:15 describes a parade.
  - How is this parade similar to the parades with which you are familiar?
  - How is it very different?
  - What does this parade mean for you? (See the devotion "Disgraced" for help if you need it.)
5. Based on everything you have read and thought about this week, what would you like to say to Jesus in response? Work together to generate a list. Then pray through it together.



# What Are You Looking For?

## SERMON SEVEN John 20:1–8



*(This sermon is suitable for use on Easter Sunday.)*

### Notes

Mary came to the tomb early that first Resurrection Day. There had been no time to properly prepare and embalm the Lord's body before they buried it Friday just before the Sabbath sun down.

Now, Sunday morning and the Sabbath at an end, Mary and the other women carried spices with them to the Lord's tomb. They intended to complete this one, final, loving act for their friend.

Entering the grave would not be pleasant; by now, the body would have begun to decay—and to smell. But that would not be the first problem. First, they would have to find a way to move the stone. But when they arrived, the stone had already been moved. And there was no body to be found! Without hesitation, Mary ran to tell Peter and John.

The possibility that Jesus had been raised from death didn't even cross Mary's mind—or the minds of Jesus' other friends. The thought was ridiculous, unimaginable! Why build up your hopes only to have them crushed again? Mary's words reveal the level of her despair: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (John 20:2).

Like the starting gun at a track meet, Mary's words set off a foot race. Peter and John took off for the tomb as fast as their feet would carry them. John, being younger and faster, arrived first. He looked in and saw the linen wrappings, but waited for Peter before going in.

Peter barely slowed down when he arrived. He plunged headlong into the darkness. There lay the linen wrappings and the face cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. It had been folded and placed to one side. At this moment, John plunged in after Peter. John looked around, taking it all in and then, in the darkness of the tomb, the lights came on for him. He got it, as we would say. Now, finally, he understood what it all meant. Jesus had been trying to tell them about this for months, but his words had made no sense at the time. Now, the fog began to clear. John began to understand how the prophets' words and every event in the history of God's people had pointed forward to this precise moment.

We are so familiar with this story, and yet it never seems to grow old. Year after year, it brings a sense of joy. It is forever new. A close study of how the first witnesses to our Savior's Easter victory experienced those events can help us more clearly see the resurrection of our Savior and discern its implications for us today.



## Notes

Three times in John 20, the apostle refers to “seeing.” The first, in verse 5, describes John as he arrived at the tomb. The text reads, “He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.” The Greek word used here for “looked in” is *blepo*, meaning “to glance at something.” John glanced inside the Lord’s tomb, but he took little notice of the details. John “looked” just like we might, for example, look into a closet, intending to pull something out, but fail to find what we want because it’s in a container we don’t expect.

The second reference to “seeing” comes in verse 6: “Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there.” The Greek word used for “saw” in this verse is *theoreo*; it means “to take careful notice of something.” At this point, Peter notices the details. The linen wrappings are lying there, right where Jesus’ body had lain. Peter also takes note that someone had neatly rolled up the face napkin. What grave robber would ever take the time to do this?

The third reference to “seeing” comes as John actually enters the tomb. Verse 8 tells us, “Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.” The word used here for “saw” is *oida*, meaning that “one gets the full mental picture.” John realized what must have taken place. At this point, the pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place. The grave clothes lay there on the stone slab like a cocoon from which a butterfly had just emerged. The wrappings retained their regular folds, as if the body of Jesus had simply passed through and out of them. All that Jesus had said about being crucified and then rising again on the third day now made sense. The prophecies of old about the coming Messiah pointed to this moment.

John and Peter had come to the tomb expecting to encounter death; instead, they found life. They saw the glory of Jesus’ victory.

The ways in which John and Peter saw Jesus’ tomb remind us of ourselves:

- Some of us will only glance (*blepo*) at the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection. We may look, but we will not study. We are quite apt to miss much—and to forget much of even that, once we leave here today. This happens when we have preconceived notions of what we will find. John and Peter expected a corpse. Looking for that, at first they missed everything else.
- Others of us will “see” Jesus’ resurrection and take in all the details (*theoreo*). We will take the time to study the accounts again. But at some point, we will fail to push past our puzzlement. We will stop and walk away, failing to gain all the insight God has made available to us in the Holy Scriptures.
- Finally, there are those of us who will see (*oida*) and will get a complete mental picture. We will understand and believe the truth that all human history hinges on this event. Those who “see” in this way will understand the life-changing meaning of Jesus’ resurrection and will live our lives based on this conviction.

## SERMON SEVEN

CONTINUED . . .



Sometimes in church, we talk about “hearers” of the Word. This text calls us also to be “seers” of it! The resurrection demonstrates that . . .

- Jesus is not a liar. He is who he says he is. He did what he said he would do.
- The Father accepted his Son’s sacrifice. He raised Jesus from the dead as proof of this.
- The grave has lost its grip on all God’s faith-full people. The empty tomb reveals the glory of Jesus’ victory. The debt of our sin has been dissolved. Death’s sting is demolished. Satan has been disarmed, defeated, and disgraced.

What are you looking for today? Do you still have your doubts about who Jesus is or what he’s done? Are you still uncertain? That’s okay. The very nature of faith requires the presence of uncertainty. The opposite of belief is not doubt, but unbelief.

If you have doubts, I invite you—even more important, Jesus himself invites you, just as he invited Thomas—to examine the evidence. Take more than a glance. Go further than noting the details. Instead, examine all the evidence and ask the Holy Spirit to fit it all into the big picture for you. All Scripture points to the fact that the tomb was empty because of the power of the cross! Look. See. Believe in the Savior who died there for you and rose again!

Christ is risen!

### Notes

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### Special Prayers

# THE POWER OF THE CROSS

## Questions to Accompany Sermon Seven



### What Are You Looking For?

1. We know the end of the story. The women headed for the tomb early on Resurrection Morning did not. Imagine their sadness as best you can.
  - What factors added to their gloom?
  - What added to the disciples' confusion and disbelief as events unfolded?
2. Does the familiarity of the Easter account add to or dampen your joy? Explain.
3. In John 20, the words *see* or *seeing* occur three times. In the original language of the text, three different words are used. In verse 5, the word translated *see* means "to glance." In verse 6, the word means "to take careful notice" of something. In verse 8, the word used means "to get the full mental picture."
  - How does this progression describe the faith of Jesus' first followers?
  - Have you ever experienced a similar progression of "sight" in your relationship with your Savior? If so, and if you're comfortable, tell about that.
4. What foundational truths does our Lord's resurrection seal? In other words, based on his resurrection, what can we know for sure?
5. What one key point will you carry away when you leave today? Explain.
6. What will you ask Jesus to do in and through you in response to what you've heard?