

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

April 16 – Mt. 26:26-30; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:14-20

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Day 106 – 259 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus and His disciples ate their last meal together in an upper room in Jerusalem. The setting was Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a commemoration of God's deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt (*Ex. 12:1-30*). The Passover meal is called a Seder (pronounced say-der), which means order. There is a specific order for which food is eaten, prayers are given, and songs are sung (*Matt. 26:30; Mk. 14:26*).

However, rather than focus on what God had done for the Jews so long ago, Jesus used the last supper to foreshadow what He was getting ready to do — die on a cross. Thus, He fulfilled the Seder, but He also infused new meaning by instituting what we now call "the Lord's Supper." In other words, Jesus connected the Old and New Testaments in one meal.

The prophet Jeremiah foretold that the Lord would make a new covenant with His people (*31:31*). Jesus introduced this new covenant, or New Testament, during the meal with two symbols — the bread and the wine. When Jesus took the bread, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is given for you" (*Lk. 22:19*). The broken bread was symbolic of the suffering He would soon endure on our behalf.

During a seder, four cups of wine are shared among participants. Luke mentioned two of them (*v.17, 20*). One of the cups Jesus connected to His blood, which would be poured out on the cross (*v.20*). Because of His sacrifice, sinners like us would not incur God's wrath or judgment. Instead, the Father would pass over us because of His Son. The Apostle Paul made this connection by referring to Jesus as "our Passover who has been sacrificed" (*1 Cor. 5:7*).

Daily Reflection

Because of this new covenant in Christ, the Passover meal has become the Lord's Supper, the first of two ordinances for the Church (the other being baptism). We partake of the Lord's Supper today **to look back** at what Christ has done for us through His sacrifice on the cross. He told His disciples, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (*v.19*).

However, notice that Jesus told His disciples that He would not eat the meal or drink the wine until the kingdom of heaven (*Matt. 26:29*). At that point, everything that the Passover symbolizes will be fulfilled (*Luke 22:15*). In other words, Jesus was prophesying that His followers (that's us) will get to enjoy this special meal with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven (*Rev. 19:6-9*). That's why Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (*1 Cor. 11:26*).

Jesus used this meal **to look back** at the Passover celebration, then **to look forward** to His death and resurrection. While the disciples didn't understand the meaning at first, they too were eating the meal **to look back** at the Passover in Egypt and **to look forward** to being with Jesus in heaven someday. Today, you and I partake of the Lord's Supper **to look back** at Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross, but we also **look ahead** at His return.

With so much symbolism, Christians should take this meal seriously, in deep reflection, yes, but also with joyous anticipation. We do it to remember Him, what He did for us in the past but also what He will do for us in the future. Jesus is our Passover who was sacrificed, but He is also our Passover who is alive and will return!

A New Commandment

April 17 – Jn. 13:31-38; Mt. 26:31-35; Mk. 14:27-31; Lk. 22:24-38

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Day 107 – 258 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus and His disciples began a lengthy and interesting conversation around the table in an upper room in Jerusalem. He took advantage of His last day with the eleven and shared another meaningful moment with them. The discussion lasted well into the night. Over the next few days, we will consider the topics that emerged.

First, the disciples took up the former debate regarding who was the greatest among them (Lk. 22:24-27). The men were still convinced that Jesus was about to establish His earthly kingdom, and they were having visions of grandeur about their position in it (v.28-30). But Jesus reminded them of the previous lesson – greatness does not reside in those who are served by others but in those who serve others.

Second, Jesus spoke of His imminent betrayal and the fact that all the disciples would abandon Him. He noted that this abandonment was predicted in Scripture. “I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (Zech. 13:7). But the men, especially Peter, vowed to stay with Jesus, even to lay down their lives for Him. However, Jesus told Peter, “Where I am going, you cannot come, but later you will follow” (Jn. 13:36). Jesus had to bear the cross alone and then return to His Father in heaven. The others would face persecution, even death (Peter was crucified), and eventually meet Jesus in heaven.

When Peter insisted that he would never abandon Jesus, the Lord predicted that he would deny him three times before morning. He also told Peter that Satan wanted to “sift him like wheat” (Lk. 22:31), meaning he wanted to test Peter (and the others) with trouble and temptation. Though they were confident and courageous in the moment, they would soon be pushed to their limits and fail the Lord. However, the Lord predicted that Peter would survive with his faith intact. He challenged Peter to strengthen the rest.

Third, Jesus told His disciples that their world would change after He was gone. The provision and protection that He had provided for them during His ministry would be lifted, and they would be exposed to great danger (Lk. 22:35, 36). After Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, the Jews would look down on His followers and severely mistreat them (v.37).

Daily Reflection

The last topic discussed in today’s passage was **a new commandment**. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you...; for by this all men will know that you are My disciples, that you love one another” (Jn. 10:34, 35). The Jews were already familiar with *Leviticus 19:18*, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” They had even heard Jesus say that numerous times, so **what was new about the new commandment?**

The new part was the phrase “even as I have loved you.” These men had watched Jesus love them for three years in ways they had not seen before. Prior to their meal, Jesus humbled Himself, took up the towel, and washed their feet out of love and self-sacrifice. The next day, they would experience Jesus’ love in a greater way, when He would give His life for theirs.

Jesus expected them (and us) to love each other that way. **Christ-followers are to be marked by love. Why?** Why would He give such a command? Why choose love as His mark?

Are you obeying the new commandment?

Do Not Let Your Heart Be Troubled

April 18 – John 14:1-31

Today in Your Reading

Jesus continued His lengthy farewell address to His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. He was preparing them for what was about to happen. After Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion, their world would be turned upside down. As a result, they would experience turmoil, stress, doubt, depression, and fear. Therefore, Jesus' words were meant to comfort the disciples, beginning with the words, "Do not let your heart be troubled..." (v.1). What follows this statement are words of encouragement.

First, Jesus comforted the disciples with words about heaven (v.2-4). Though Jesus was going away for a while, He assured the men that He was preparing a place for them and that He would come again to take them home with Him. Meanwhile, He gave them directions to help other people find their way. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," He said. "No one comes to the Father but through Me" (v.6). Salvation and eternal life are found only in Christ.

Second, Jesus reminded them that He and the Father were one (v.7-11). He was more than a man and more than a prophet. He was the Son of the Father, God in the flesh. Jesus was helping the disciples understand the concept of the trinity, for He would soon send the Spirit to indwell them. Though He was about to leave and return to the Father, Jesus would live in them through the Spirit (v.20). They would be comforted by knowing that He would always be with them (Matt. 28:20).

Third, Jesus comforted the disciples by sending them the Helper, referring to the Holy Spirit (v.16). The words that Jesus used to describe the Helper was *another of the same kind* (like Jesus), meaning that the Spirit was equal to God, having the same power. The Spirit would indwell Christ's followers and empower them to fulfill the Lord's mission (v.16-20). The Spirit would also enable His disciples to remember all that Jesus taught them (v.26).

With the Spirit's power, Christ's followers would accomplish "greater works" than He did, not in type but in extent (v.12). Though His ministry was brilliant and impactful, it was limited in scope. It only lasted for three years and, in the big picture, only affected a small percentage. The disciples would take His message of salvation to the nations and change the world.

Fourth, Jesus comforted the disciples by reminding them of the power of prayer. "Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do" (v.13). Of course, this was not a promise to fulfill selfish whims and desires but to accomplish His will, that "the Father be glorified in the Son" (v.14).

Daily Reflection

"Peace, I leave with you, My peace, not as the world gives... Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (v.27).

What troubles you today? What causes you turmoil, stress, doubt, depression, or fear?

What did Jesus tell His disciples today that comforts you most?

Abiding in Christ

April 19 – John 15:1-16:4

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Day 109 – 256 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus continued His final message to the disciples on their last night together in Jerusalem. Frankly, one could spend weeks studying Jesus' address in *John 13-17*, because His words are so rich with instruction and inspiration. Today's passage is no exception.

To understand this section of Christ's message, we must begin with His illustration of the vine and the branches (*15:1, 5*). Jesus called Himself the true vine, distinguishing Himself from the vine of the Old Testament — the nation of Israel — which failed to produce fruit (*Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21*). Jesus, instead, is faithful to the vinedresser, who is God the Father. The branches are the followers of Christ.

However, notice that there are two types of branches — fruitful and fruitless. There are those who appear to be a branch on the vine but have no evidence of salvation, no fruit of the Spirit (*v.2*). Those branches are not abiding in Christ and will be removed and burned (*v.6*). For example, Judas appeared to be a follower of Christ (one of the disciples), but in time his true loyalties were revealed. He was a pretender. Remember, Jesus predicted that there would be many who will say to Him, "Lord, we did great things in your name," whom He will reject because He did not know them (*Matt. 7:21-23*).

The second group of branches are those that "bear much fruit" (*v.2, 5, 8*). This fruit is not referring to church attendance, church giving, or even church ministry. Rather this fruit is referring to evidence of the Lord's work in your life — Christlikeness, the characteristics or fruit of the Spirit, a changed heart, mind, attitude, and lifestyle.

In fact, Christ mentions such fruit in the rest of the passage. For example, Jesus said that His followers will be marked by their love (*v.12*), their obedience to His commandments (*v.9, 10*), and by persecution of the world (*v.18-27*).

Daily Reflection

The fruit that Jesus mentioned here is not of our own doing; rather it is evidence that we are abiding in Christ. Jesus used the word *abide* ten times. It means to remain, to dwell, to rest, to stay, or to continue. Abiding in Christ is not something that we have to try hard to do. If we are in Christ, meaning one of His children, then we are already abiding in Him. **As a result, we cannot help but produce fruit, because we are alive and growing, changing into His image.**

Does this describe you? Do you see evidence in your life of a transition into Christlikeness? Are your thoughts, attitudes, views, values, and character changing? How so?

The part of this passage that causes me to cringe a little is this, "Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (*v.2*). **Even if we are producing fruit, the Lord wants to remove anything that hinders our fruit bearing.** For example, He allows difficult things in our lives so that we can grow in our faith. **What is painful at first enables us to be more productive in the end.** How has God been pruning you lately? Can you see the fruit yet?

The Helper

April 20 – John 16:5-33

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Day 110 – 255 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus continued his farewell address to the disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. In this section of the address, Jesus spoke of the role of the Holy Spirit, as well as His resurrection and what was to follow. Let's consider these two topics more closely.

First, **Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Helper** (v.7). The Holy Spirit is the third member of the trinity (Godhead), equal to God the Father and God the Son (Jesus). He is a person, not a force. Notice the personal pronouns used to refer to Him. The Holy Spirit would come to indwell Christ's followers at Pentecost and help them fulfill the great commission (*Matt. 28:19; Acts 2*).

Jesus told the disciples that it was to their advantage that He leave so that the Spirit could come (v.7). In other words, there are several advantages to the Holy Spirit's presence. Of course, one of them is that the Spirit will indwell Christians forever. Though Jesus would leave, the Spirit would remain until the end. His roles will include (but not be limited to) convicting people's hearts and minds of sin, righteousness, and judgment (v.8-11), guiding us into truth (v.13), and glorifying Christ (v.14).

The word *helper* here describes one who is called in for support. It also refers to one who speaks in favor of another. Finally, it could describe an advocate, a consoler, and an intercessor. Simply put, **the Spirit plays many roles, all to glorify Christ and enable His people.**

Second, Jesus discussed His death and resurrection (v.16). "In a little while, you will no longer see Me (death), and again a little while, and you will see Me (resurrection)." While His crucifixion will be difficult for the disciples to endure, Jesus predicted that their "grieving would be turned into joy" (v.20), like a mother who endures birth pains until the baby is born. Then, her distress is turned into joy (v.21).

Jesus told them that they would eventually scatter and abandon Him (v.32). However, though they would face tribulation and persecution following His resurrection, Jesus told them to be at peace and to take courage, for He has overcome the world (v.33).

My favorite verse in our passage today was Jesus' promise, "I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you" (v.22).

Daily Reflection

How is it that we can have peace amid trials? How is it that we can have courage amid tribulations? How is it that we can rejoice while we wait for our Savior to return? **The Lord has not left us alone.** We have His Spirit inside of us, enabling us to have joy, courage, and resolve during our long and arduous wait. In the meantime, the Spirit also helps us to accomplish all that the Lord wants to do in and through us.

How does knowing that Christ is present with you, in the person of the Holy Spirit, encourage your daily walk? How has He enabled you?

The Helper is real, and He's here to stay. How can the Helper help you today?

That They May All Be One

April 21 – John 17:1-26

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 111 – 254 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus prayed with His disciples on their last night together in Jerusalem. Although we often refer to Jesus' instructions in *Matthew 6:9-13* as the Lord's Prayer, there He was only teaching His disciples how to pray. Today's passage is truly the Lord's prayer, the longest one recorded in Scripture. It is sometimes called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, as He interceded for others like the high priests did in the Old Testament.

Jesus' prayer is an important transition in the gospels. It is the official end of His ministry and the beginning of His final hours. The prayer also ended His time with the disciples in the upper room. Next, they will move to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives where Jesus will soon be betrayed and arrested. But before moving on to the garden events, let's consider some of the topics of Jesus' amazing prayer.

Jesus' prayer can be divided into three sections. First, He prayed for Himself (v.1-5). Then, He prayed for His disciples (v.6-19). Finally, He prayed for all believers (v.20-26).

Jesus first prayed for Himself (v.1-5). He knew that the time had come for His arrest and crucifixion. In that moment, His focus was on glorifying the Father by accomplishing all that He was sent here to do, namely finish the work of salvation (on the cross) and attain eternal life for believers (through His resurrection).

Next, Jesus prayed for His disciples (v.6-19). He asked that the Father keep them or guard them (v.11, 12), as He had done while He was with them. "Not one of them perished," He said, "except for the son of perdition (destruction)," referring to Judas, which was a fulfillment of Scripture (*Ps. 41:9*). **Jesus prayed that they may all be one, united in Him** and set apart (sanctified) for the fulfillment of His purposes (v.11, 17, 19). Finally, Jesus prayed that the Father would keep them from Satan's power, as

they would remain in his domain and threaten his strongholds with the spread of the gospel.

Finally, Jesus prayed for all believers in the future, which includes us (v.20-26). **He prayed that His followers would be perfected in unity**, finding common ground in Christ's redeeming love, no matter who they are or what they've done. Jesus also prayed that all believers would be with Him where He is (heaven), that we might see Him in His glory (v.24).

Daily Reflection

It's interesting that **Jesus prayed for unity both for His current disciples and for those believers who would follow later** (like us). Describe what it looks like to "all be one, perfected in unity."

Is unity easy to achieve? Why or why not?

What is required of believers to work towards and achieve this unity?

What are you doing to work towards unity with other believers in your church?

Yes, Even Though

Today in Your Reading

Jesus and His disciples left the upper room in Jerusalem, walked across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives (east), and entered the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas was familiar with the garden, as Jesus had taken His disciples there many times. However, before His betrayal, Jesus spent time in prayer.

Since the hour of His betrayal and arrest was near, Jesus was deeply grieved and distressed to the point of death. During His prayer time, He sweat drops of blood (a condition known as hemosiderosis). The weight of the world's sins was on His shoulders, pressing the life out of Him. How fitting since Gethsemane literally means "oil press." Olives must be pressed to get the life-giving oil.

Another subtle storyline here is the fact that Jesus was in a garden dealing with the curse of sin, just as Adam, the first man, was in the Garden of Eden causing sin. Notice Jesus told Peter, James, and John to pray while they waited so as not to enter temptation (*Lk. 22:40*). What the first Adam caused the second Adam (Jesus) will cure. The curse of the serpent, brought about by the sin of man, will be reversed by the Son of God (*Gen. 3:15*).

Still, being the sacrificial Lamb of God weighed heavily on Jesus. He recognized that the Father was asking Him to drink the cup of His wrath and judgment alone (*Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17*). His human nature desired to pass this cup. The horror of crucifixion was seemingly too much to bear. But, despite His reservations, Jesus prayed that the Father's will be done.

Jesus uttered the most courageous words in the Bible, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me, yet not My will but Yours be done" (*Lk. 22:42*). **The most important word in this statement is yet. Y.E.T. — "Yes, Even Though."** Even though what the Father was asking was difficult, Jesus said, "Yes, I will do it."

Daily Reflection

Jesus "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death" (*Phil. 2:8*). **He said yes to the cross even though He was grieved by the thought of it.** What an example for us to follow!

Many times, what the Lord asks of us is difficult, frightening, or hard to understand. Our natural tendency is to avoid it and take the path of least resistance. **Yet, the choice that glorifies God is to obey His commands or to submit to His will. The response that most reflects Christ is to say, "Yes, even though I have reservations."**

What is God asking you to do that causes you to fear or fret? God is calling you to go forward, but you have refused. What are you experiencing that has given you stress?

Take a minute to read *Joshua 1:9*. What encouragement or challenge do you find here?

Whatever the Lord is asking of you today is nothing compared to what He asked Christ to do. Still, sometimes your problems look so daunting. **Just remember to say Y.E.T — yes to His will, even though you may foresee danger or difficulty.** Imagine what your future would look like if you never said no to the Lord but always said, "Yes, even though."