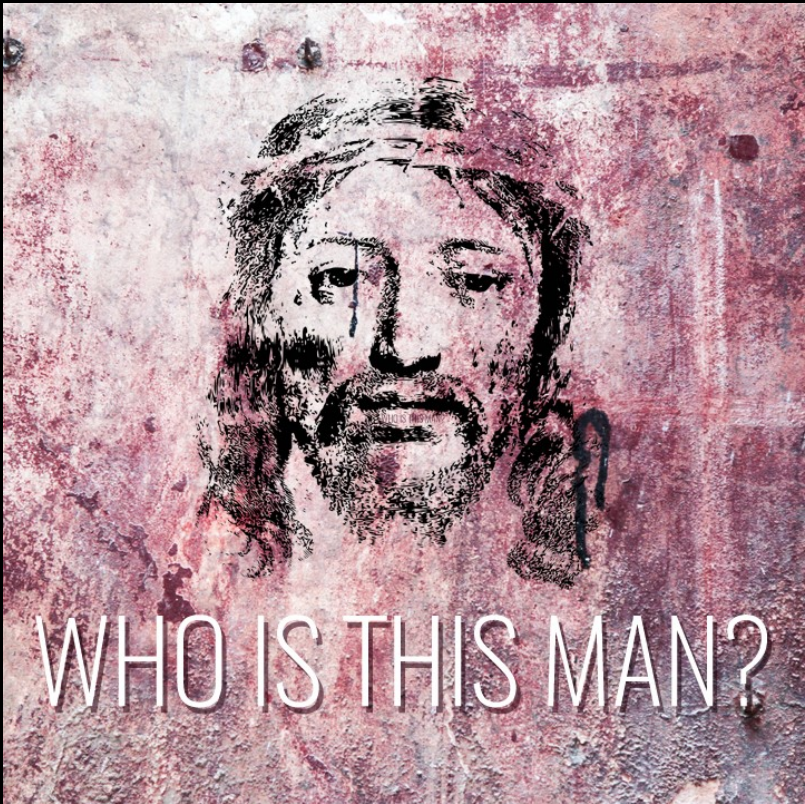


# Who is This Man?

Daily Devotionals

*Believers*  
FELLOWSHIP



# Introduction and Purpose

This series is an opportunity to consider both the simplicity and the complexity of who Jesus is. The simplest way that we know Jesus is summed up in the song, “Jesus loves me, this I know,” but the complexity of who Jesus is has occupied lifetimes of study.

As we continue to pursue a life in imitation of Jesus, we never really leave our initial understanding behind, even as we begin to develop a richer understanding of him. Scripture gives us several ways of understanding Jesus, and we’ll be reflecting on these different roles each week.

This devotional series isn’t meant to be the final word on describing the person of Jesus, but instead it's a chance to explore the truth of who Jesus is in a new way. I’m praying that as we communally learn, reinforce, or nuance our understanding of Jesus, our lives will be changed.

I’m praying over the times we spend in these devotions, that God would speak to us through them, spark conversation around them, and that in our study we all would be drawn further into the image and likeness of Jesus our good God.

Jeremiah Hinton  
Pastoral Resident

# Jesus the Law-Giver

7/10/2017 (Monday)

*The Multi-Faceted Jesus*

One of the early difficulties the church faced was a desire by some Christians to collapse down the four gospels into a single book, called a “harmonized” gospel. The first recorded example of this was by a 2nd century Christian name Tatian. He decided that the four gospels were better read as a single narrative, instead of four distinct voices, and created a book called the Diatessaron.

On the one hand this is easy to understand; we like our facts neat and orderly, and the gospels presentation of Jesus can seem complicated with four viewpoints. The desire to flatten out these four viewpoints into a single view isn’t always a bad thing, but it does prevent us from seeing a fuller picture.

Our presentation of Jesus as exclusively one way or another flattens out the complex character that the Bible presents us with. The New Testament presents us with a view of Jesus that is multi-faceted, and intended to be a vibrant witness of who Jesus is. Mark 10:45 tells us the Jesus, “came not to be served but to serve.” while Matthew 2:2 has wise men searching for the “King of the Jews”. Luke’s gospel will inform our understanding of Jesus’ humanity, while John will emphasize his divinity.

Consider this week where you have seen Jesus displayed as a new or greater Moses, or where you've seen Jesus related to the Law. Read Matthew 5:17, and consider whether it is easy difficult to think of Jesus as related to the Law?

Matthew 5:17

*7/11/2017 (Tuesday)*

*A New Commandment*

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The golden rule appears throughout times, cultures, and ethical traditions. As soon as children are able to understand empathy, they are taught the golden rule as a means of socialization.

If all Jesus was saying in this passage was the golden rule, it couldn't rightly be called a "new" commandment. What Jesus is saying in this passage is not merely a rephrasing of a well-known adage, he is moving his disciples beyond reciprocity.

Jesus does not say to merely "Love one another as you would like to be loved", Jesus instead says, "Love one another as I have loved you." By replacing his perfect love for us as the standard, Jesus' commandment moves us away from a "give-to-get" orientation.

Romans 5:8 picks up this theme in reminding us that while we were still sinners, before we demonstrated the reciprocal behavior, Christ died for us. Reflect today on the places in your life where you have received love in both of these ways.

Where have you earned and received love, and where have you been given love that you did not deserve? Why would Jesus give this new command to his disciples?

Romans 5:8

**7/12/2017 (Wednesday)    *You have heard it said...***

In Matthew 5 Jesus gives his longest continuous teaching from anywhere in the Bible. Jesus starts by teaching through Old Testament scriptures, but around verse 5:17 Jesus shifts gears. He confirms that he's not overturning anything from the law, and in fact he's here to fulfill it, but he also starts adding in a new phrase.

Starting in 5:21, Jesus introduces the formula, "You have heard but I say." The dynamic at work is "You have heard this in scripture, but I have the last word and here it is." There's no getting around the fact that Jesus is claiming primacy over scripture. There are two people who try to take primacy over scripture, liars and God.

In these verses, Jesus is actually teaching on two levels. On the one hand he is instructing us to righteousness, expounding on the intent of the word of God, his word, found in the Old Testament (You have heard). At the same time, he is letting us know that he has the authority (But I say) to add to that scripture.

This is a harmonious blending of the Word of God as revealed in the Old Testament and a revealing of the living Word, Jesus Christ. Jesus' use of "But I say" is not in conflict with the previously revealed Word of God, because it was his word to begin with.

It's an unfortunately common misunderstanding of scripture to say that the Old Testament and Jesus are somehow at odds. The same God who revealed himself to Moses as "I am" in the Old Testament reveals himself to the Pharisees as "I am."

Reflect today on how it would affect your reading of the Old Testament hear it in the voice of Jesus.

Matthew 5:21

**7/13/2017 (Thursday)      *Living Water***

As Moses led the Israelites through the desert, their travels were anything but easy. They faced shortages of food, questions of leadership, and even the desire to go back to Egypt. But as anyone who has spent time in the desert can tell you, the inescapable need is first for water.

Thirst follows you in the heat of the day, and in the cool of the night. You're never more aware of your reliance on something other than yourself than when you don't have enough water.

In Exodus 17:6, the Israelites are first faced with the realities of desert life, they have no water. As the grumbling and talk of stoning Moses begins, God intervenes by commanding Moses to strike a rock, which miraculously pours forth life-giving water. More than a thousand years later, the people of Israel have discovered that they are still thirsting.

In a scene that summarizes this shared condition of deep need, Jesus talks with a woman at a well about a water that satisfies thirst forever. In John 4, Jesus explains that he is the living water, that he is the Messiah, and that he is the satisfaction for the otherwise inescapable thirst we feel.

While Moses struck the rock as God commanded and water satisfied the Israelites for a time, Jesus was crucified and poured out his life on our behalf. We too have a deep thirst that is seemingly unquenchable. It is only in the person of Jesus that we find satisfaction, that we find living water.

Consider today where you have felt a deep need. What has been a temporary satisfaction? Where is Jesus offering you living water?

Exodus 17:6

7/14/2017 (Friday)

## *The Creator of Moses*

Hebrews 3:3 tells us, “For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses – as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.”

This verse tells us that Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, because even though Moses received and delivered the law, Moses was created by Jesus.

Because it was Moses who God used to deliver the Law, he is often elevated to a position of prominence. Through Moses, God gave his people an understanding of how to live as God. Because of this, when people spoke about Moses he was almost a synonym for the law.

For the original readers of Hebrews, claiming that Jesus was greater than Moses was like saying Jesus was greater than the law that Moses represented. In the verse above, they would have heard “As much deference as you’re giving Moses, give to Jesus. As much reverence as you give to the law, give to Jesus.” Or, as much honor as you give to “religious” things, give to Jesus.

Ultimately the law that Moses received, point towards Jesus. When we are convicted or encouraged by people who honor God with their lives, it’s important to remember that they are also God’s workmanship. Just as Moses’ life pointed towards the one greater who was to come, the lives of God’s faithful should also rightly point us to Jesus.

Think today about the people who have had the deepest impact in your spiritual development. How have they been helpful in pointing you towards Jesus?

Hebrews 3:3

7/15/2017 (Saturday)

*Who is this man who forgives?*

Here's the trouble with sins, however you think of them, impurity, a debt owed, a mark missed, an honor slighted, or an opportunity lost, they need to be corrected to get right with God. The impurity has to be purified, the debt has to be repaid, and with an acceptable payment.

The missed mark has to be hit just right, the honor has to be avenged, or the opportunity has to be somehow reclaimed. Not only does the initial action need to be reversed, it has to be reversed by someone qualified to do it.

If I was asked to sterilize an infection before a procedure, I hope that I would have the sense to ask for the help of a medical professional. I have no business operating in that arena.

In the same way, if someone is going to forgive sin, they better have the right to operate in that arena.

In Matthew 9:1-8 Jesus encounters a paralytic man who is brought to Jesus by his friends. Jesus, moved by their faith first forgives the man of sin, and then heals his paralysis.

The gathered scribes rightly think to themselves, "Only God can operate in that arena, who is this man who forgives sin?" Jesus lets them know. It's true that only God has the authority to operate in that arena, and Jesus does just that.

Matthew 9:1-8



# Jesus the Prophet

7/17/2017 (Monday)

*Who do you say that I am?*

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

It's a helpful insight into Jesus' ministry to hear what people were saying about Jesus during his ministry. By the time Jesus asks his disciples what people think about him in Matthew 16, his ministry is well under way. He has turned water into wine, driven out evil spirits, performed healings, raised a boy from the dead, calmed the wind and the waves, and fed the 5,000. At this point in his ministry Jesus has claimed equality with God, demonstrated his mastery over the elements, and his authority over spiritual beings.

And yet, people try make Jesus a smaller figure. They can't outright deny his impact, but they seem to want to diminish him, to fit him into a category they already have room for. The Jewish leaders had room, even reverence, for prophets, but they didn't know what to do with Jesus.

While it's true that Jesus and the prophets shared many features, Jesus does not stop at being a prophetic voice, just as he does not stop at being a law giver, or a high priest, or a miracle worker. Jesus inhabits and transcends all of these neat boxes, because he is God incarnate.

Consider today some of the ways you've seen people attempt to diminish Jesus into smaller, manageable categories.

Matthew 16:13-14

7/18/2017 (Tuesday)

## *An Astonishing Message*

Because of their impact and power to change the status quo, the words of a prophet have been called “words of shattering”. Jesus’ words are so powerful that people actually stop what they’re doing and pay attention. If you’ve ever been “stopped in your tracks” you know it’s not more of the same.

The things that catch our attention are shocking, provocative, mystifying, or even terrifying. Jesus’ words in Mark 1:22 would have been all those things and more to the people who heard him. Jesus starts off preaching in the synagogue. A guest preacher with a message to share can be interesting, but here we read that Jesus’ words were “astonishing” to the people.

The impact of this astonishment can be diluted when we switch to quickly from Greek to English. The word used to describe Jesus’ teaching is *ekplesso*, and it carries the idea of being struck hard, as in Biblical plague hard, coupled with the idea of outward movement. Another way of saying this would be, “Jesus’ words hit them so hard it knocked the wind out of them.”

When we think about the torrent of information we process, it can be hard to think of a teaching that could really knock the wind out of us, or stop us in our tracks. It takes something truly spectacular to really get our attention anymore. Something in Jesus’ words had that power to his audience in Mark.

Take time to consider what Jesus’ claims really mean. Why does it matter that Jesus forgave sin, what are the implications? Why does it matter that he proclaimed himself equal to God, or that he rose from the dead? What in that message is shocking enough to knock the wind out of you?

Mark 1:22

**7/19/2017 (Wednesday)    *The Prophetic Critique***

Throughout the Old Testament, when false forms of praise entered the temple, God used the prophets to bring a fiery word of correction. While they did speak uniquely to their contexts, the prophetic critique is usually a calling to account of false worship in the sacred space.

Elijah's ministry begins with a critique of King Ahab, a King of Israel who had given up worship of the true God for worship of Baal. It's worth noting that Baal was believed to have power over rain, essential for the agrarian society living in Canaan. It's not surprising that in 1 Kings 17:1 we read that God chose to punctuate the prophetic voice of Elijah a drought, a total nullification of this false god's presumed power.

In a critique of their worship of baal, God uses Elijah to demonstrate to his people just how little power the idol they worship has. As Elijah calls the people of God back to right worship, we'll see a foreshadowing of Jesus' own prophetic ministry. Jesus' harshest critiques were for the falsely pious, and that's never clearer than when he enters the temple in Matthew 21:12.

Read this passage in the light of Jesus' prophetic ministry. What false worship has entered the temple? What is the word of correction that Jesus is bringing?

Matthew 21:12

7/20/2017 (Thursday)

## *A Lived Resistance*

The path that God calls us will often pull us out of step with the cultural rhythms. We see this brightly outlined in the life of Elijah. Among the people of God corruption runs rampant and the worship of a false prosperity God fills the land. Elijah alone stands against an entire nation overrun with the priests of Baal, out of step with the flow of culture, out of sync with the status quo.

Whether its worship of Baal, worship of power, or worship of success, we are consistently under pressure to conform to cultural values. In Elijah we see a demonstration of resistance against the powers opposed to God, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Elijah's resistance against the complacency that allows the worship of idols is rooted in his profound obedience to God. This obedience is also a foreshadowing that is fully realized in the radical obedience of Jesus. Throughout his ministry Jesus was tempted to give in, just a little, to the cultural rhythms that surrounded him.

In an even more profound way than Elijah, Jesus was tempted to participate in false worship of God. Read Matthew 4:1-11 and consider the different types of cultural rhythms Jesus resisted.

Where do you feel similar pulls to conformity? Where has God pulled you out of step with cultural rhythms?

Matthew 4:1-11

7/21/2017 (Friday)

## *The New Elijah*

The resistance of Elijah culminates in an explosive display of power on Mount Carmel. Before the gathered people of Israel, a final standoff is made between the one remaining faithful prophet of God, and 450 prophets of Baal.

In Elijah we see foreshadowed the eventual triumph over idolatry, over false gods of all sorts, and over the powers of death. It's later in Jesus that this prophetic voice standing in contrast to a passive ritualized, religion is fully realized. It's in Jesus that the false religion of earned, bought, or bartered righteousness is finally shattered.

In 1 Kings 18:20-40 we see that the priests of Baal could not dance, or mutilate their false god into action, no matter how earnestly or sacrificially they tried. In contrast Elijah's prayers are answered with meteoric intensity, not because of Elijah's righteousness, but because of God's love for his people.

In Jesus we see that no personal righteousness, no matter how well intentioned, can satisfy God's standards. It is only God's deep love for us, fully realized and demonstrated in Jesus, which can satisfy God's perfect righteousness. Read through 1 Kings 18:20-40 today and think of the ways that you've seen God move in your life.

Where have you tried to earn God's love? Where have you seen it freely given?

1 Kings 18:20-40

*7/22/2017 (Saturday)*

*Jesus' Prophetic Ministry*

One of the hallmarks of a successful prophet throughout history is that their prophecies come to pass. This was important enough that Deuteronomy 18:20 instructed that any prophet who prophesied in God's name and was wrong was to be killed. To prophecy was not a light undertaking, and the very real consequences for being wrong were death.

This proximity with death brings the prophet into stark contrast with what can seem like an otherwise safe existence. Every time a prophet speaks on God's behalf, they are taking their lives into their hands. It's with this seriousness that we can consider the way that Jesus was referred to, and lived into the prophetic calling.

In John 7:16 we read that Jesus' teachings were given to him from God, in John 17:8 Jesus says that God the Father has given him specific words. While Jesus was fully God and fully man, for some of his ministry he participated in the prophetic ministry and received the word of God from God the Father.

Throughout the Old Testament, prophets acted as the voice of God to the people of God, and Jesus is no exception. However, although living into the prophetic ministry was an aspect of Jesus' ministry, it wasn't the entirety of his ministry.

Reflect today on Jesus' prophetic ministry. What does this ministry tell you about him? About his relationship to God the Father?

John 17:8

# Jesus the Miracle Worker

7/24/2017 (Monday)

*The Punctuation of Action*

In Mark 1:23-27 Jesus has just finished teaching with such authority that the people are left astounded at his words. Before Jesus has a chance to catch his breath, “immediately” a man possessed by a demonic spirit starts screaming at him. Imagine first the scene in our own context.

A relatively unknown teacher comes and delivers such an intense message that you are left with your mouth hanging open. This day will be a pivotal day in your life one way or another, but before you can respond, a man starts screaming. He claims to know Jesus, asks whether he’s come to destroy “us”, and finally accuses Jesus of being the Holy One of God. Before you can catch your breath, this Jesus whose words have already astonished you, shocked you, turns to the man.

He says, “Be silent” or better translated, “Be muzzled” to the demon. Out of the raw force of his sovereign voice he shuts the mouth of this seemingly uncontrollable man. What was most interesting was not the reality of demonic possession, but rather that Jesus commanded, from his own authority, that the demon leave. As if you didn’t already have enough to think about. This Jesus not only teaches in such a way that your view of the world changes, but he punctuates his teaching with a never-before seen display of power.

A power that you thought only belonged to God. Consider today that Jesus was not satisfied to merely persuade the world through words. He joined the world, and while in it, he punctuated his words with authority and action.

Mark 1:25-27

7/25/2017 (Tuesday)

## *The Consequences of Healing*

“It's worth stopping and paying attention when Jesus asks a question, because there is often more at stake than we initially see. John 5 finds Jesus visiting a prominent religious site, the pool of Bethesda.

There among the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed he finds a man who has been an invalid for thirty eight years. Jesus asks the man, "Do you want to be healed?" The man says in effect, "Yes", and Jesus heals him. For nearly his whole life he's been affected, if not defined, by his inability to walk. Jesus finds him clinging to hope that a magic pool would heal him. It looks obvious that this man wanted to be healed, but Jesus pauses to hear his response.

Whether he realized it or not, the man actually had a fairly profound choice to make. While we don't know his age, thirty-seven years as an invalid must have been a significant portion, if not the majority, of his life. To be healed at this point in his life would be a significant reorientation. Jesus is asking him, "Do you want to give up everything you know? Your routines, the people you sit by, the way you get your food, the position you hold in this community, your worldview, your identity, your whole life?"

Do you really want that? Jesus has the power to heal, but the question that is asked of us is do you truly want to be healed? New life in Christ is not without consequence. If you've been healed, you could still sit by the pool as though you were not healed. You could live into the same routines, hold the same position in the community, find your food the same way, but why would you?

Consider today the places where you have already been healed. How did your life change because of it?

John 5



## 7/26/2017 (Wednesday)    *Restraint of Power*

Sometimes, the most impressive demonstrations of power are found in restraint. In our early lives we're most impressed by things that are loudest, fastest, biggest, and brightest. As we grow to understand the cost and consequences of displays of power, it can become more meaningful to us when we see these displays restrained.

The head of a circus master in a lion's mouth implies more power than holding the lion in chains. The cool temper of a wise leader is more valued than a red-faced temper tantrum. A single stone can kill a giant. In the same way Jesus demonstrates the depth of his power through his restraint.

In Matthew 26:53, as Jesus is being arrested in the Garden, Peter attempts use the power of his sword to keep Jesus safe. Jesus says, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

In this moment Jesus' restraint communicates a deep truth about his power. He is in no way the prisoner of mortal men.

Jesus' ministry, the pain he is about to experience, the depth of sadness, all of it happens because of Jesus' obedience to God the Father.

Consider the implications of Jesus' restraint today. How does his access to unfathomable angelic force inform your reading of the gospels?

Matthew 26:53

7/27/2017 (Thursday)

*A Foretaste of Restoration*

In Matthew 12:38 Jesus is confronted by a group of Pharisees who have been arguing with him about the miraculous nature of his ministry. They suggest that his power over evil comes from evil, and as proof they ask that he perform a sign.

This may seem like a simple enough request, especially since Jesus has been so readily healing the people that he's encountered, but their request reveals a misunderstanding of Jesus' ministry. Jesus didn't join with humanity to prove his divinity to us, he came to destroy the works of the devil.

Tim Keller wrote, "Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that he has power but also wonderful foretastes of what he is going to do with that power."

Jesus' miracles are incredible displays of power, wonderfully assuring signs of God's great love for us, but even more, they are an indication that Jesus is truly making all things new. They are a foretaste of the restorative work that Jesus has already begun to accomplish.

As Keller indicates, the miracles that Jesus performed point us towards the reality that is to come when Jesus restores creation to the form it held when God called it "very good".

Consider today that places that you are anticipating the restoration of creation.

Matthew 12:38

7/28/2017 (Friday)

## *Jesus Calms the Storm*

“And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”

The distance between the type of man that the disciples thought Jesus was and what type of man Jesus turned out to be was stark. They knew beforehand that Jesus could cure the sick, and that he spoke with wisdom and authority, but maybe they hadn't really understood what they were signing up for until Jesus acted in their personal arena.

When Jesus moves in the environment that we are intimately familiar with it makes an impact. When Jesus spoke with authority over the waters, to a fisherman, would have seemed capricious, generous, treacherous, and volatile, it rightly caused them to marvel.

The answer to their question, “What sort of man is this?” is the same answer that Job received in Job 38 when he questioned God. This man is the same God who laid the foundations of the earth, who shut in the seas and made clouds its garments, and now has no issue commanding the winds and sea to be silent.

Jesus' mastery over the elements affected these fisherman more profoundly than his ability to heal leprosy, to preach with eloquence, or to teach with authority. When God moves miraculously in our area of expertise, it tends to make a big impression.

Where have you seen God's presence in your area of personal expertise?

Matthew 8:27

7/29/2017 (Saturday)

## *Who Do You Live That I Am?*

Thomas doesn't have the best reputation in Christian tradition, he's usually thought of as the guy without much faith. To this day when we're calling someone a skeptic we might call them a "doubting Thomas." While it's true he wanted to see proof, it's not entirely fair to sum up his whole personality as "doubting." In fact it might be better to call him, "Pay-attention-to how-people-are-living-Thomas."

John 20:25 describes the disciples making claims to Thomas that they've seen the risen Lord. We know from earlier in the chapter that they did in fact see Jesus. This is a miraculous occurrence that would have rightly shook up the disciples, but look how the disciples are living. In 20:26 we read that eight full days after the disciples saw the resurrected Jesus, they were still hiding out behind locked doors.

This doesn't seem like the behavior of a group whose leader just returned from the dead. It might be that Thomas isn't especially skeptical as much as responding to how the disciples were living. We don't read his motivations in scripture, but we do know that the lived witness of the disciples was not convincing Thomas that Jesus was alive.

What does your life tell other people about Jesus? We might be quick to say, "I have seen the risen Lord", or maybe something like, "Jesus is my King", but do our lives reflect the statement? Do we really live as though Jesus is the ruler of our lives?

Ask yourself today whether someone looking in from the outside know what you believed about Jesus from your actions as well as from your words.

John 20:6

# Jesus the High Priest

7/31/2017 (Monday)

*The Pain of Loss*

“Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself”

Jesus' withdrawal to a quiet place is in response to overwhelming tragedy. Earlier in the chapter John the Baptist is beheaded for calling out Herod's moral failure. John is Jesus' cousin and most likely grew up nearby each other. If you have ever lost a close friend or family member, you know the pain that Jesus was experiencing in this moment.

Additionally, John is perhaps the only person who truly understood Jesus' ministry at the time. It took Jesus' death and resurrection before his closest friends would understand who he was. In this passage, Jesus lost a family member and potentially the only person who really understood him.

It's in this loss that Jesus withdraws to solitude. We from Hebrews 4:15 that that one aspect of Jesus' ministry was to become a high priest who could sympathize with our needs, and the cost of this willingness is demonstrated in part in this passage.

Jesus is not so removed from the lives of humans that he is unaffected by the loss of his cousin, we see in this verse a very human response to loss, but without sin. Jesus is our great high priest because in his grief, he continues in right relationship with God.

Think of a time in your own life where you have felt deep loss, how does it impact you to think that Jesus also felt deep loss?

Matthew 14:13

## ***8/1/2017 (Tuesday) Gut Level Compassion***

We read in Matthew 14:13 that Jesus withdraws to solitude when he hears of the death of his cousin. In light of the loss Jesus has endured, we might give him a pass if he were to wallow in self-pity for a bit, but that's not the example we are given.

Our great high priest experienced what we experienced, all the pain of loss, but didn't turn inward. In another example of the multifaceted life of Jesus, we see him drawn back into ministry out his deep compassion for others.

We see in Matthew 14:14 that charges out of his solitude, overflowing with compassion for those in need of healing. The Greek word for his emotion is *splagchnizomai*, which means to be moved to your guts for someone.

Jesus understands both the deep ache of personal loss, and isn't immobilized by it. Jesus is moved to deep compassion by the needs of the people he loves, without being numb to the pain he personally experiences. The Psalmist writes of God's love for us individually in Psalm 56:8 when he sings, "you collect my tears in your bottle."

You and I are known and loved personally, by our God who added humanity to his divinity so that he could become our great high priest.

Consider today the ways that you have seen Jesus' compassion for you personally.

Matthew 14:14

**8/2/2017 (Wednesday)      *An Informed Royalty***

Marie-Antoinette was queen of France royalty during the French revolution. During her reign, the queen's attitude towards those without food was summed up in the phrase, "Let them eat cake." Whether she actually said those words or not, the quote was meant to illustrate a queen so out of touch with the hunger of her subjects that she couldn't understand what it meant to be without food.

Her exalted station insulated her from the needs of the common people she ruled over.

We read in Matthew 14:13 that Jesus is ministering to the people who traveled from the towns on foot to him for healing. Because we read in that same verse that Jesus had withdrawn by boat to a desolate place, it's safe to assume they've traveled quite a ways.

In verse 15, the disciples remind Jesus that the people need to head back into town to buy food. The contrast between Jesus' response to the hunger of his subjects, and Marie-Antoinette is stark.

Jesus has chosen not to insulate himself from the needs of the people, he has chosen to become one of us. Jesus knew first-hand what it was to walk all day, to hunger, and to thirst. Jesus' understanding of our needs is why in 14:16 he feeds the crowds instead of saying, "Let them eat cake."

Reflect today on the reality that Jesus chose not to insulate himself from our sufferings.

Matthew 14:15-16

**8/3/2017 (Thursday)**

***Intercessor***

The role of the High Priest in the Old Testament was one set apart for the work of the Tabernacle. While the instructions in Exodus required a certain level of discipline from the Priests of God, the High Priest was held to an even stricter standard.

Perhaps the most visible task the High Priest was called on to perform was during the feast of Yom Kippur. On this day the high priest alone was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies where the presence of God resided. After offering sacrifices for his own sin, the high priest would enter into the presence of God and offer the blood of animals to cover the sins of the people. In this way, the people of God's sins were covered, and they were able to live in good standing before God.

Hebrews 7:24 tells us that in a similar manner, Jesus acts as our high priest, constantly interceding for us. But with Jesus, the priesthood takes on several new elements. Instead of every year, Jesus is constantly before the Father interceding for us. His perfect blood replaces the sacrifices high priest made with the blood of animals, and instead makes a once-and-for-all covering of our sin.

Jesus also is without sin, and unlike the high priests of the past, does not have to make sacrifices for sin before entering into the presence of God. Jesus' role as intercessor means that we can experience right standing before God in a way that would have been impossible apart from him.

Consider today the reality that Jesus is constantly interceding for you as your great high priest. There is never a time that he is not interceding on your behalf. How does this inform the way you see yourself before God?

Hebrews 7:24



**8/4/2017 (Friday)**

***A More Excellent Ministry***

As high priest of Israel, Aaron was responsible for mediating the covenant between God and the people of Israel. This position of honor was established by God, and even when Aaron led the Israelites in worship of a golden calf, God extended grace to cover his failures. Aaron's priesthood endured until a new, more excellent covenant was established with Jesus as the mediator. Hebrews 8:6 tells us, "But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises."

This more excellent covenant is not simply a replacement, but a deepening or quickening of the old covenant. Under Aaron the cleansing of sin was temporary, the sacrifices were animals, and they were given on behalf of both the priests themselves as well as the people they served. The priests could only enter into the presence of God by means of the blood of the animals they sacrificed, due to their own imperfection.

Despite all these limitations, the grace God extended to his people was miraculous. That a perfect and holy God would make a way for his imperfect and constantly sinful people to enter into his presence demonstrates his deep love and care for us, a commitment deepened in the priesthood of Jesus.

While the priests under Aaron entered the presence of God through the blood of animals, Christ's blood was the means by which he entered.

Consider today the generosity of the covenant God extended to Aaron, and then compare that to the more excellent covenant established through Jesus.

Hebrews 8:6

8/5/2017 (Saturday)

## *The Mother Hen*

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

It's interesting that of all the birds that Jesus could have chosen to compare himself to he picks a chicken. With the same metaphor he could have picked an Eagle, or a swan. The swallow is mentioned in Psalm 84, even taking care of her young in a similar way. Of the things that the chicken reminds us of, power is not one of them.

The chicken is common, even domesticated, accessible, and very ordinary. Jesus is represented elsewhere in scripture as the lamb, another animal without particular glory but at least with more symbolic meaning in the sacrificial system. In the fragile wings of the hen, and in the meek gentility of the lamb, Jesus is telling us something important about how he chose to reveal himself.

There is a willingness to be broken, a strength in vulnerability, and a reversal of our conception of power.

Everything about the hen's love, weakness, and vulnerability fits with the life of Jesus. His power was not conventional power, his Kingdom was not of this world. When God added humanity to his divinity, his vulnerable, self-giving love was the most potent characteristic on display. Through the selfless love, like the love of a mother hen, Jesus broke the bonds of Satan, sin, and death.

Reflect today on Jesus' self-description. How does it change the way you think of him?

Matthew 23:37

# Jesus the Suffering Servant

8/7/2017 (Monday)

*Complexity and Simplicity*

John 3:16 is one of the first verses that we're introduced to as American Christians. It's in our Sunday Schools, at our football games, even on freeway overpasses. In this verse we are introduced to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for sin, and our means to an eternal hope, and while it's a beautiful insight into the person of Jesus, it doesn't summarize him entirely.

When we first encounter Jesus, it's often in the context of a smaller group, a friend, or a local church body. Maybe it starts with a mother singing over us, or a conversation over coffee, or a beautiful song that sticks with us, but this initial introduction always comes from a particular lens. We might first see Jesus as the perfect sacrifice, and only later hear about the fiery prophet who overturned temple tables and despised false religion.

The gospel message is as simple as John 3:16, as simple as "Jesus loves me this I know," but there's also much more going on. In Jesus we see the fulfillment of the law, the extension of unfathomable grace, a prophetic voice of shattering, a priestly love that intercedes, a self-sacrificial servant, a ruling and reigning King, the promised messiah, God incarnate, an eternal hope for right relationship with God, and the fullest expression of what a human was intended to be.

This richness of complexity should never detract from our first understanding of Jesus, but it can be a stretching experience.

How have you experienced Jesus as God who suffered and died on your behalf? How have you experienced Jesus in other ways?

John 3:16

**8/8/2017 (Tuesday)**

***Not to be Served but to Serve***

From the first time he filled his lungs with air, Jesus lived in intentional humility. The question of his parentage marked him as a social outsider before he ever had a chance to speak. He was born as a citizen of an occupied nation, whose freedoms extended only as far as Rome allowed. Jesus wasn't even in a position to support himself financially when as his ministry continued. We read in Luke 8:1-3 that Jesus was supported through the financial donations of several women who followed him.

This isn't just a rough hand he was dealt that Jesus played out as best as he could, this is an intentional statement by the all-powerful, infinite God. Jesus intended to be a servant.

We read in Mark 10:45 that Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve. His message of the upside down Kingdom where the first is last and the last is first was written into his story from before the day he drew his first breath. The witness of Jesus' unconventional warfare against what we thought of as "powers" began the moment he added humanity to his divinity.

Our God, who had the infinite might of heaven as his birthright, demonstrated a new type of power to our broken world. He lived, suffered, and died on our behalf as a shock and awe demonstration of power that forever shattered the bonds of Satan, sin, and death.

Today, think about the details of Jesus' life that point to his intentional humility. What does it mean that our God set out to not only preach, but live servanthood in so many aspects of his life?

Mark 10:45

**8/9/2017 (Wednesday)      *Your Will be Done***

Jeremy Bentham is an English philosopher known for his work in Utilitarianism. Among his better known ideas is the premise that we are governed by the pursuit of pleasure, and the avoidance of pain. His “greatest happiness principle” is still embedded in our thinking, and even bleeds into aspects of our theology.

The prevention of pain, or the increase of pleasure is not the life that Jesus demonstrates to us. Instead, Jesus’ life seems to indicate that obedience to the will of God is the highest good, even when that route leads through suffering. In Luke 22:42 Jesus says, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”

As Jesus is faced with the reality of pain to come on the cross he prays honestly to God the Father. However because Jesus’ mission was not to increase his own standing or prevent future pain, but instead to serve, he prays “not my will but yours be done.” It’s unfortunate how often we buy into the idea that pleasure, or “my will be done” equals blessing, especially while Jesus’ example stands in stark contrast to the idea.

Considering that God’s plan for his own Son’s life was one that included suffering even to death, we shouldn’t be surprised if obedience to God leads us into roles where we are servants or even experience hardship.

Consider the places in your life where God has invited you into servanthood roles. Is your tendency to say “Your will be done.” Or “My will be done?”

Luke 22:42

**8/10/2017 (Thursday)**

***No Lazy Servants***

The idea of a lazy servant isn't so much a servant, as a self-styled master who refuses to serve. In servanthood there is always a cost, always the potential for rejection, the potential for humiliation, or even death.

In John 13:1-20 Jesus has gathered with his disciples for the Passover meal. In a demonstration of humility, Jesus postures himself as a servant, and undertakes the lowly task of washing each of their feet. In an era where roads were shared with animals, and feet were almost constantly in contact with the dirt and grime of the road, it's understandable why this was not a fun task to undertake.

Jesus takes up the task of the lowliest of servants, and then explains to the disciples the consequences of what he's done. Jesus explains, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him."

In his service, Jesus demonstrated to his followers what was expected of them. We are not called to a passive mediocrity without action, or without service, instead Jesus invites us to follow him.

Where have you lived into the example of Jesus' service to others?  
Where have you felt called?

John 13:1-20

**8/11/2017 (Friday)**

***The Greatest Among You***

“A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

Jesus recognizes a stream of thought at work in the disciples discussion that is prevalent across cultures and contexts; the association of Greatness with lordship. This idea boils all the way down to might makes right, to the victor go the spoils, and survival of the fittest.

Whether greatness is associated with military power, economic might, religious devotion or political savvy, the assumption is whoever is the “most” will be the greatest. At this point in their conversation Jesus could have rightly claimed “greatest” or “most” in any of those categories. Instead he reminds them of the example he has given them.

Jesus inverts their understanding of greatness. Where before the master would be called the greatest, here the master has come to serve. In Jesus’ topsy-turvy kingdom, greatness is expressed through servanthood, not through lording over others. It’s a reversal authenticated by Jesus’ own participation.

Think about the ways that greatness is culturally defined where you live. How is that different or similar to what Jesus describes?

Luke 22:24-27

**8/12/2017 (Saturday)**

***A Recklessly Brave Love***

An aspect of servanthood that's easily overlooked is the ability to truly see other people and their needs. When we become overly obsessed with ourselves, with our own needs, our own desires, and our own accomplishments it is increasingly difficult to be aware of others around us.

Mathew 9:36 reads, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

At this point in his ministry, Jesus is well known. He has enough attention to have disciples that follow him, he is well known as a healer, and crowds gather to meet him wherever he goes. By Matthew 9, Jesus is already more famous than most of us will be in our entire lives. He does not need to care for the individuals for his ministry to gain prominence, but prominence is not his goal.

Jesus' character, and the character of God, is on display when he looks out on the crowds of people and sees them deeply enough to know their need. He doesn't simply acknowledge that there is a vast crowd of needy people, he has compassion on them.

He cares enough about others to understand them and the particularity of their need.

Consider today how easy or difficult it is for you to stop and notice the needs of those around you.

Matthew 9:36



# Jesus the True Human

8/14/2017 (Monday)

*Humanity in Adam*

1 Corinthians introduces the idea of Jesus as “last Adam”, a perfectly obedient son who demonstrated how humans should have related to God. The contrast between Adam and Jesus creates a number of interesting illustrations. While Adam was given dominion over the earth, Jesus is Lord over all things. Adam is tested in the garden, and fails. Jesus is tested in the desert, and is faithful. Adam’s failure brought the human race to sin, separation, and death, but Jesus’ victory brings us redemption, reconciliation, and eternal life.

Where Adam is disobedient, Jesus is perfectly obedient. Where Adam’s sin introduced the reality of death to creation, in the new heaven and the new earth death will be done away with.

Revelation 21:3 tells us, He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Jesus was tempted as we have been tempted, but did not sin, and the contrast between Jesus’ response and Adam’s is stark. Jesus shows us participation in the will of God is life-giving for, while pursuing our own way leads to death.

While we understand this dynamic as it relates to Adam and Jesus, sometimes its hard to let it hit closer to home. Where are you living in obedience to God today? Where are you pursuing your own way?

Revelation 21:3

**8/15/2017 (Tuesday)**

***Humanity in Christ***

In the same chapter that Adam and Eve first sin, God sets in motion a redemption plan. There's no reason why God should redeem humans, we don't exactly have a good track record at this point, but for some reason God seems attached to us. However because death enters into creation through Adam, the restoration also has to come through a human.

God doesn't leave his creation broken, even if it broke itself. 1 Corinthians 15:21 & 22 tells us, "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

Through Jesus, God overwrites the disobedience of Adam. Where Adam walked imperfectly, and where we have continued to walk imperfectly in rebellion against God, Jesus lives a perfect life. In the temptations to glorify ourselves, to consider ourselves to be like God, where Adam failed, Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

In every place where we have invited sin and death, Jesus lives as the perfect human, tempted as we are tempted yet without sin. It's only through the perfect life that he lived, and the death he died on our behalf that we are restored to right relationship with God.

Reflect today on the ways that Jesus was tempted and still lived a perfect life. How would your reactions to the day look if they were perfectly in line with the will of God?

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

## **8/16/2017 (Wednesday)    *A Child-like Question***

One of the most difficult parts of learning something new is acknowledging we don't know everything about it. Especially when we're invested in the answer, adding new information can seem unnecessary or even dangerous. When we ask, "Who is this man?" It's helpful to ask from a position of humility.

We have to come to the question as beginners, whether we've been in the faith for sixty years, whether we've taught classes, have degrees, or had powerful experiences. How we ask the question is almost as important as the question itself.

When we ask "Who is this man?" we can't help but bring in our experiences, but if we expect to get anywhere new we need to ask the question as children. Open-hearted and wide-eyed learners, searching after a deeper understanding of God. We ask, "Who is this man?" not as people who have the final, definitive answer, but as a people of faith who understand a little more each day. I

It's often the case that our own unwillingness to assume the position of created being prevents us from experiencing God rightly as Creator. It's in approaching God as his beloved children, in search of help only he can provide, that we are rightly oriented to him.

In Matthew 18:3 Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven."

Reflect on the idea of asking child-like questions today. What is a forgone conclusion that you might reexamine or enhance? Where is God inviting you to understand Him in a new way?

Matthew 18:3

**8/17/2017 (Thursday)**

***The Lie of Autonomy***

Our self-reliance is rooted in the lie that we are autonomous beings. This is actually the first lie that humans were ever told. The snake in Genesis 1 insists, “You don’t need God, you can be god on your own.”

When confronted with the lie that directly, it’s easier to resist. However, it’s the same lie as, “If you work hard enough, you won’t need anything.” Or “If you get to a place of safety, you won’t ever need to be afraid.” We were created for relationship with God. No self-improvement or spiritual advancement will ever bring us beyond that. We are fundamentally designed to be reliant on God.

Jesus’ presence in human history accomplishes a number of things all at once, but one that is easy to overlook is his demonstration of right relationship between humans and God. Jesus fully relied on God. Acts 10:38 tells us about, “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power”

Despite the fact that scripture tells us that Jesus is the Son of God, co-eternal, co-equal in power, and capable of acting on his own, Jesus instead relied wholly on the equipping of God. Jesus refused the lie that we are autonomous.

In the face of cultural lies that encourage us to be rugged individuals, isolated from all help, self-reliant, and insulated, we preach Jesus. Jesus who in the seeming weakness of dependence demonstrated that the only true strength we can ever achieve is the strength that comes through full reliance on God.

Consider today the places where you feel as though you have to be self-reliant. Where are you trying to fill God’s shoes?

Acts 10:38

**8/18/2017 (Friday)**

***The New Adam***

Genesis 1:27 tells us, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Before sin entered the world, God’s selfless love had poured out in a creative expression that culminated in the creation of man. The capstone of creation, molded in the very image of God. Have you ever wondered what humans were like, before sin, before the fall, when we were still new and we walked with God in the garden?

What we see in Jesus is the perfect expression of humanity. The perfectly obedient, perfectly trusting, selflessly obedient Jesus demonstrates what proper human relationship to God looks like. He is able to laugh, to love deeply, to cry, to mourn intensely, and to participate in the lives of those around him. Jesus is not an aloof, distant sage with no time for the people around him, he is a friend, a son, a jungle gym for children, a passionate defender of truth, and a participant in the world around him.

As we anticipate the future that Jesus secured in his victory over Satan, sin, and death, we take comfort in the knowledge that God is making all things new. There will be a day when we are fully restored to what we were meant to be, and what we see demonstrated in the life Jesus lived as a human.

Consider today what it means to be a human, based on how Jesus lived.

Genesis 1:27

**8/19/2017 (Saturday)**

## ***Human Limits***

One of the ways that Jesus exemplifies what it means to be human is by participating in human limitations. Jesus sleeps, Jesus eats, and Jesus takes down time to rest. Philippians 2:5 tells us that Jesus, "...did not count equality with God as something to be grasped..."

What Jesus demonstrates to us in his participation with us is what it looks like to accept the limits of humanity. To acknowledge our weaknesses. To offer deference and praise to God, by first admitting that we are not God, that we have limits, and that our limits are as much a part of our design as our strengths.

The oldest lie that we are told is that we are limitless, that we can be just as good as God, or that we can become God. From the snake in the garden, to technology's promises of eternal youth, to the religious traditions that claim we can be gods, the lie is that we should resist our limits.

Jesus demonstrates to us that we were made creatures with limits, and we live most fully into what we were made to be when we live within those limits. Because our righteousness is found in the work of Jesus, we are uniquely free to acknowledge our limitations, we are free to be known as the people who acknowledge their limits. We are free to be the people who recognize their weakness, that celebrate their createdness, that do not count equality with God as something to be attained.

Where have you been told that you should work harder and become like God? Where are you being called to acknowledge that you are not God?

Philippians 2:5

# Jesus the Messiah

8/21/2017 (Monday)

*I Am*

1 It turns out that Jesus is uncompromisingly specific when he talks about himself. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." and in case there was any question as to what that meant he continues, "...No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus' self-description immediately sets aside any question as to the possibility of religious pluralism. When we talk about the person and work of Jesus, there is often room to ask questions about meaning, context, and intent, but from the mouth of God we hear that there is only one way to the Father and it is Jesus.

Jesus claims to be not one of many ways, but the way. Jesus claims to not be an aspect of, or partial piece of truth, but the truth. Singular. He claims not to be simply a participant in life, but the life. What we choose to believe about Jesus is often informed by a multitude of influences, but it's stunningly clear what Jesus thinks.

Jesus is the only way to right relationship with the Father. No other path, secret knowledge, service, religion, or work will do, he is THE way. No life exists apart from him, and no truth exists that is not found in him. More than simply knowing the truth, Jesus claims to be THE truth. Singular. When we approach the question, "Who is this man?" we need to take seriously the radical claims he made about himself.

How do you respond to the idea that Jesus claims to be the one, singular way, truth, and life? What parts of that claim are easy for you to agree with, which parts are hard?

John 14:6

8/22/2017 (Tuesday)

## *Who Do You Say That I Am?*

“The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”

It's generally not the case that people have a problem with Jesus, so long as he doesn't make claims to divinity or exclusivity. So long as they are able to paint him as a sweet, wise, sage who preached love for others he's given a pass. It's when Jesus is presented as the one and only God that people object.

To the Jews, Jesus' claims to divinity could only be the fulfillment of the messianic hope, or outright blasphemy. As Jesus was not the Messiah on their terms, they concluded he was a blasphemer. Today, Jesus' claims to divinity are problematic in their exclusivity. Any one “god” among other “gods” won't imply the need for a response. This is why pluralistic religions can coexist with one another. It's only Jesus' claims of exclusivity, his insistence that, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” that cause people to reject him.

Jesus' claims also put pressure on us, tell us that if he is God, then we are not god, that any of our various, socially accepted idols aren't god, and that makes people uncomfortable. Being told that you are not living in accordance with the will of the one true God can really only push you in one of two directions, you either acknowledge God or you reject God.

Consider today the reasons you have heard for a rejection of Jesus. What is most offensive about the gospel?

John 10:33



## **8/23/2017 (Wednesday) Fulfillment**

The Messianic prophecies that surround predict Jesus foretell his life in miraculous detail. Prophecies as specific as what town he was to be born in were known by scholars, and King Herod even relied on a messianic prophecy to track Jesus at his birth. However it's often the case with us, and it was the case with the disciples, that both understanding and believing these prophecies can be difficult.

In Luke 24:25-27 Jesus has caught up with two disciples as they travel the road to Emmaus where he speaks with them about his resurrection. As they are slow to understand, he says, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Even though these disciples had literally walked with Jesus, they still needed to have the details explained to them, which is an encouragement to us when we are "slow of heart to believe".

Additionally, Jesus traces a story of himself through the scriptures for them. He walks them through Moses, then the prophets, and finally explains how even the sufferings of Jesus were necessary to fulfill scripture. He demonstrates to them the long-sightedness of God's redemptive plan that has been realized. Jesus was not an anomaly or a coincidence.

The ministry of Jesus has its roots as far back as Genesis, and its fruits as far forward as eternity. Reflect today on the places where you have seen Jesus throughout the Biblical witness.

Luke 24:25-27

8/24/2017 (Thursday)

## *Clinging to Self-Righteousness*

For some people, the grace of the gospel is the most difficult thing to comprehend, and for others it's the reality of sin. Some of the religious leaders in Jesus' time held to the idea that they were righteous on their own. Luke 18:9 tells us that Jesus told a parable to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt."

In considering these religious leaders, author John McManus observes, "The claim that He must become the sacrificial Lamb who would take away the sins of the world was an insult to their sense of piety and self-righteousness."

The first lie we were ever told is that we can be just like God apart from God. Today we wouldn't outright say we don't need God, but we might describe ourselves or others as a "good person." This is an appeal to righteousness on a spectrum. When we can find others who are less kind, less generous, less pious, or just sin more visibly than us, we can call them unrighteous, and claim a personal righteousness of our own.

The trouble is, when we deny the need for any righteousness but our own, we find ourselves in a strange position when the Messiah arrives. When Jesus showed up with a plan to fix what was broken, some of the fiercest resistance he encountered was from the people who claimed nothing was wrong.

Laying down our own self-righteousness and accepting the righteousness of Christ can be a humbling process.

Consider today whether there are places where you're holding on to your own righteousness and denying the need for a savior?

Luke 18:9

8/25/2017 (Friday)

## *Searching Without Arriving*

In the midst of a much deserved reprimand, Jesus offers what can almost be considered a compliment to the religious leaders who were critiquing him. Jesus says, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

You can imagine the frustration in his voice as he tries to explain to the children he loves, how very close they are to seeing him truly. He acknowledges that they have been searching the scriptures, because they think that eternal life is to be found in them, and they’re not wrong. It’s only in their refusal to come to Jesus who the scriptures point to that they miss the point.

Jesus’ position within the scriptures uniquely prepares him to be received by the people who study the scriptures. The messianic prophecies that trail through the Old Testament lead up directly up to Jesus and confirm his birth. It’s a tragedy to have followed the map laid out through scripture up to the treasure itself, and refuse to partake in it. And this continues to be a tragedy to this day. Simply having the scriptures is not enough.

Even having the scriptures and studying the scriptures is not enough either. It is only when we agree to come to Jesus, who the scriptures point to that we will find eternal life.

Reflect today on the ways that we can study scripture by refuse Jesus. How have you seen this happen?

John 5:39-40

8/26/2017 (Saturday)

## *The Unconventional Messiah*

Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem is often called "The Triumphal Entry." We read in Mark 11 that Jesus enters into the city on the back of colt, a symbolic gesture that would have brought to mind a King entering a conquered city. Jews familiar with the Torah would recall Zechariah 9:9 which prophesied the coming of their king in just this way.

The people's cries of "Hosanna!" literally meant, "Lord, save!" and the crowd tore down palm branches to pave the road this saving King would travel. The implications here are clear. The people saw Jesus as the promised Messiah, and they weren't wrong, but it didn't take them long to figure out that he was not the Messiah they wanted. The crowd wanted their Messiah to be a conqueror in the Roman sense, they wanted Jesus to compete with the Roman war machine by bringing about a Jewish war machine.

All too often we have in mind a way for God to work that is too small. The crowd was interested in a messiah who would answer their immediate threat, military occupation. But Jesus is not that messiah. Jesus is THE Messiah. God's plans always run deeper than ours. God's plans are always more astonishing, more miraculous, and more audacious than anything we come up with.

The crowd wanted a savior who would battle the Romans, but Jesus came to battle sin and death itself. When they found out what kind of Messiah he was Jerusalem was no longer filled with cries of "Hosanna", but instead the streets rang with "Crucify him!"

Who have you wanted Jesus to be? How have you responded when you didn't get what you expected?

Mark 11

# Jesus God Incarnate

8/28/2017 (Monday)

*The Miracle of Attention*

In the beginning God. The Word of God, who existed before the concept of time was established, chose to join together with temporal, physical, human flesh. The unexplainable generosity of this partnership is a miracle by itself. We move too fast past the laugh-out-loud miraculousness of God choosing to partner with us.

First that we would receive, out of all the created order, the special attention of the originator of life is an unfathomable mystery. Of all the galaxies worth of beautiful and terrifying celestial bodies, creator God chose to pay special attention to us.

Then, despite our failure to align ourselves in right relationship with the creator of all things, despite our rebellion and participation in sin, the eternal God began a plan for redemption. The Word of God emptying himself, as Philippians 2 describes, so that he could restore us to what we were meant to be. The Word became flesh, added physicality to eternity, truly became the created thing without ever losing divinity. There simply isn't a unit of measurement for the orders of magnitude the Word of God descended down to join with us, to show us what we were supposed to be.

Before we even begin to describe the ministry of Jesus, we can learn something from just his attention. If nothing else, the incarnation demonstrates to us that humans are incredibly important to God.

Consider today that the Creator of reality took time not only to notice us, but to forgive, partner with, love, and restore us.

Philippians 2

**8/29/2017 (Tuesday)**

***Jesus Fully God***

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

We know that Jesus is the Word of God, present with God the Father and the Holy Spirit before the creation of the world. We also see Jesus entering into human history, adding humanity to his divinity, participating with us and redeeming us. What we also told in Revelation 1:8 is that Jesus is not just the beginning of all things, but also the end of all things, all that will be.

This brings to mind Isaiah 44:6 where God says, “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” There is no innovation of new ideas that can move beyond God, he is the last. There was no secret knowledge to pre-exist God, he is the first. All that has been, and all that will be, finds its life, its movement, and its being in the person of Jesus.

It can be difficult to reconcile the immensity of God who was and is and is to come with the carpenter born in Bethlehem, but that is the message of the Bible. The immensity of eternal God was bound together with human form.

Reflect today on Jesus being not only beginning, but also the very end. How does it change the way you see him? Which is easier to understand for you?

Revelation 1:8

8/30/2017 (Wednesday)

*Jesus Fully Man*

For the disciples who walked with Jesus, ate with Jesus, and spoke with Jesus, one of the most difficult things to understand was his divinity. Despite hearing his teachings, witnessing his miracles, and even being directly told, it took them awhile before they understood Jesus as God. In the time that followed Jesus' ascension, people struggled in the opposite direction.

For those of us who came to know Jesus first as God, it can be hard just as hard to understand Jesus as a man. Some of the earliest misunderstandings of Jesus implied that he wasn't actually human.

2 John 7 warns "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh". And while the desire to honor Jesus' divinity is appropriate, we miss out on what Jesus accomplished on our behalf if don't recognize his humanity. Jesus walked as a human, in the way that we were meant to walk. Jesus lived as we were meant to live, without sin, in reliance on the God, and became our perfect sacrifice.

If Jesus did not join himself to us, did not impart his righteousness to us, we do not have right relationship with God. The humanity of Jesus is an essential aspect of our understanding of redemption, because without the righteousness of Jesus we still fall short of the righteousness of God.

Is it easier for you to recognize the humanity or divinity of Jesus? How does that affect the way you think about him?

2 John 7

8/31/2017 (Thursday)

*Jesus we Already Know*

Mark 6 finds Jesus preaching in a synagogue, and based on the response he is met with, not being especially well received. On one hand the people acknowledge that he is teaching with authority, and performing miracles, but on the other hand they're a little bothered by him, because of the ideas they already had about him.

Mark 6:3 reads, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him."

It's entirely accurate that Jesus was the son of Mary, the brother of James and so on, but that's not all he is. Sometimes the ideas that we already have about Jesus prevent us from understanding him as he presents himself.

It's true that Jesus is fully man, and so we might be tempted to dismiss him as just another good teacher. It's also true that Jesus is fully God, and we might discount his ability to understand what we're going through. It's true that Jesus extends grace to the sexually immoral and financially corrupt, and that his harshest rebuke is for religious hypocrites. It's true that Jesus has adopted us as sons and daughters, but we can't forget that the particularity of his Jewishness does not disappear when we join his family.

The ways that we understand Jesus can be unconsciously conditioned by the true things we already know about him and that can make it hard for us to understand him more fully.

Where is God calling you into a new understanding of Jesus that is challenging or even offensive to you? Where has he already brought you somewhere new?

Mark 6:3



*9/1/2017 (Friday)*

## *The Fish-fry*

When we think about the humanity of post-resurrection Jesus, it's important to remember that he's not a disembodied faraway sage. Jesus often gets painted as a sort of untouchable, pristine, and somber person, especially post-resurrection, but that's not the picture that scripture paints of him. He's the same Jesus whose best friends were a bunch of fisherman.

He's certainly God, but we can't forget that he's also fully the same complex, authentic man that he was before his death on a cross. It's not surprising then, that having risen from the dead he doesn't first show up in the synagogue. He doesn't return to the Pharisees, to demonstrate the necessary corrections to their doctrine. He doesn't show up with the scribes to publish an academic treatise on the resurrection. He doesn't talk with the Sadducees and give them the nitty-gritty on life after death.

We read in John 21 that what Jesus does do is gets together with the people he loves and fries up a mess of fish. What follows is a commissioning to the work of the Gospel for Peter, but it's important not to miss the details. Jesus didn't have to serve his disciples, but he sets the fire and starts cooking before they pull up to the dock. Jesus didn't have to meet with them over a meal at all.

Jesus certainly didn't owe Peter any loyalty after Peter's betrayal, but there Jesus is, cooking up a mess of fish with the people he loves.

Think today about Jesus, fully God and fully man, who could have gone anywhere, or met with his disciples under any circumstances, but chooses to share a meal with them on the beach.

John 21

9/2/2017 (Saturday)

## *The Central Figure*

The author H.G. Wells said, “I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history.”

Whatever we say about Jesus, from any position of belief or disbelief, we have to acknowledge that human existence is oriented around him. While his active ministry lasted only three years, he has impacted the course of history more thoroughly than any human being before him or since. In contrast, the combined teachings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle stretched over a period of 130 years, but don't impact history as deeply as Jesus' ministry.

Romans 11:36 tells us that, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen”

The center of human history is this penniless preacher from Nazareth, Jesus Christ. How we respond to that reality is up to us, but we can never ignore it. For those of us who follow Christ, this is a position of prominence that aligns with our understanding of God incarnate. He is rightly at the center of human history, because he is the eternal God. For those who don't yet acknowledge Jesus as Lord, it asks a terribly important question; “Why is this Jesus the center of human history?”

We confess as followers of Jesus that he is the center of human history because he is God. That he added humanity to his divinity, defeated the power of sin and death, and made a way for us to have right relationship with God.

How does it change your understanding of Jesus when you reflect on his central position in human history?

Romans 11:36

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