



JESUS THE SAVIOR | SESSION 1

ANointed FOR BURIAL

Matthew 26:6-16

The Point: Our heart's condition is revealed either by our giving or our greed.

HIS STORY

Mary Anointed Jesus' Head with Oil

At first glance, it is difficult to appreciate what was happening in this scene. For starters, who among us would be at all honored by someone sneaking up behind us and pouring an entire bottle of olive oil or strong perfume on our heads? We would probably be humiliated, if not extremely confused.

However, anointing oil was used for a number of purposes in Scripture. People are most familiar with it in its function as symbolic of an Israelite office or authority. For example, priests were to be anointed with oil (Ex. 29:7), as were kings (1 Sam. 10), and even prophets (1 Kings 19:16). Additionally, certain objects were anointed, as was the case with the tabernacle (Ex. 40:9). What all of these examples have in common is the consistent theme of setting apart a person or thing for devotion to God.

► **The perfume Mary used was expensive. What does this tell you about Mary's sacrifice and her love for Jesus?**

► **What does Mary's gift teach us about giving to others?**

Jesus Praised Mary's Gift of Devotion

For the disciples there was no compelling reason to empty an entire bottle of valuable oil on Jesus' head. However, they missed the significance of the act of devotion and expressed their belief that her gift is wasted. But by demeaning this woman and the value of this act, the disciples unknowingly demeaned Jesus Himself and His coming death and resurrection.

Not only did Jesus praise her action, but He also declared that it would be forever etched in the story of the gospel as an example of devotion and love. Throughout Scripture, the people of God are marked by their giving.

Judas Planned Jesus' Betrayal

Matthew immediately moved from the anointing to the betrayal, and what was implied in his account was made explicit in John. According to John 12, it was Judas who led the chorus of condemnation of the woman's anointing, and it was not from love of man, but of money. Thus, when he went to the chief priests and asked for payment, his motivations had already been exposed. Judas was not driven primarily by religious or theological conviction, but by greed.

The contrast between Judas and Mary could not be more striking. Mary was willing to forfeit wealth for Jesus. Judas was willing to forfeit Jesus for wealth.

Essential Doctrines

Christ as Sacrifice: *There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently "once and for all" take away sins.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ In what areas of your life do you feel as though you are generous?
- ▶ What compels your generosity?
- ▶ In what areas of your life do you feel as though you are greedy?
- ▶ What do you think causes us to become greedy and unwilling to be generous with the things God has given us?

YOUR MISSION

Head

Imagine you have \$50,000 in a savings account. How certain would you have to be that an investment is a worthy pursuit before you invested your money? Mary's act demonstrated her generosity and her faith and confidence in Jesus. She had witnessed firsthand His provision and power (including in the raising of her own brother, Lazarus, from the dead) and so she freely gave. She understood the value of her gift as being a mere symbol of the infinite value of the One to whom it was given.

- ▶ Why should our generosity be motivated by who God is and what He has done for us?
- ▶ What does your generosity say about the level of your own gratefulness to God?

Heart

According to James 4:1-4, arguments and conflicts arise from our desires and cravings. Judas craved money. The chief priests craved power and privilege. We are all creatures driven by desire; our cravings and longings are reflections of our loves and lusts. Not everything we desire is necessarily wrong or sinful. However, even good desires become distractions and idols when they become demands in our hearts.

- ▶ Based upon the heart test that James provided, what do your day-to-day pursuits and actions reveal about your heart's desires?
- ▶ What does your current level of generosity to others reveal about what your heart truly values?

Hands

Mary, who poured expensive oil on Jesus, provides an example of giving that is not a waste, but an act of worship. It did not make sense by the world's standards. However, Jesus affirmed Mary and showed that He is more valuable than anything in this world. In turn, we see that giving as an expression of worship is the only true and pure form of generosity. This session has made it abundantly clear, God calls us to treasure Christ above all wealth and to express our devotion through visible acts of worship.

- ▶ What are a few practical steps you can take to begin practicing generosity as an overflow of devotion and worship?
- ▶ How might you begin to cultivate a greater love for Christ that compels you toward generosity and sacrifice?

HIS STORY

Jesus Entered the City on a Donkey

Rolling out the red carpet is a sign of respect and hospitality for the head of state or a celebrity making a grand entrance. Jesus, the anointed King, was entering the city. The long-awaited Messiah had finally come. Ages of sorrow, hope, and longing were being fulfilled before their very eyes. In recognition of the gravity of the occasion, the crowds placed their robes and palm branches before the feet of the King who was riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Jesus Cleansed the Temple

The Jesus of our culture is a caricature; He is often pictured kneeling beside a group of children, carrying a sheep, or hugging a stranger. He is always happy and smiling. The idea of Jesus getting mad or sad is completely foreign to the version of the happy hippy Jesus our culture often portrays.

Unlike these cultural caricatures, Scripture presents a Jesus of passion and humanity. However, unlike our frustration with school or responsibilities, Christ's frustration came from a place of holy discontentment. Jesus was not offering a critique of fair trade or making a statement on economic policy, but was instead declaring that this was neither the time nor the place to be selling. He turned the temple upside down as a sign of cleansing, much like a person might take all the clothes out of a drawer in order to rearrange a dresser.

- ▶ **Does Jesus' reaction surprise you? Why or why not?**
- ▶ **How would you have responded if you were with Jesus or in the temple when this occurred?**

Jesus Healed the Lame and the Blind

Once the tradesmen and animals were driven out of the temple, many of the hurt, lost, and broken filtered in. The blind, lame, and children came to see, hear, and touch Jesus—He healed them all. The temple was in an uproar as the children cried out, calling Him Hosanna.

Meanwhile, other eyes were watching and ears were listening. These eyes and ears observed with disdain all that happened as their glory and authority crumbled around the feet of Jesus.

- ▶ **How did the priests and scribes accuse Jesus?**
- ▶ **How did Jesus respond to them?**

Essential Doctrines

Temple of the Holy Spirit: *The Holy Spirit indwells the church, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 12:13). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, we live lives differently than before, bearing the virtuous fruit that comes only by the indwelling work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This indwelling work of the Spirit also equips individual members of the church with gifts for the work of the ministry (1 Cor. 12:11).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Why do you think the prophecy predicted that the Messiah, the King, would enter the city on a donkey? What does this say about Jesus' humility?**
- ▶ **What is the difference between regular anger and a holy anger?**
- ▶ **What do you think motivated Jesus in this mission of cleansing the temple? What is the takeaway for us today?**
- ▶ **What is something new and important you have learned from this session?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The fact that Jesus entered the city riding a donkey is significant. According to 1 Kings 1:32-35, we see that it wasn't the first time a Jewish king had ridden into Jerusalem on a mule. Solomon, the last great king of the united kingdom of Israel, entered the city riding a donkey. The son of David rode into the city on a donkey to be anointed as king. But later, the greater Son of David rode into the city, the One whose reign would be eternal.

- ▶ **Why do you think it is important that Jesus fulfilled these Old Testament prophecies?**
- ▶ **What kind of confidence in your faith does it give you to know that Jesus fulfilled all of these Old Testament prophecies?**

Heart

The good news of Hosanna is that Christ has come to save us from our inadequate worship. Just like the blind, lame, and children who came to see, hear, and touch Jesus, we too can be healed. Jesus embodies faithfulness. He is the king who came to restore true worship, even in our unfaithful hearts. He is able to replace a cold or even lukewarm heart with one that overflows with genuine praise for Him.

- ▶ **When have you experienced gratitude and hope in Christ to such a degree that it overflowed into praise?**
- ▶ **What does a life of praise and worship look like?**

Hands

It's solely on the basis of what Jesus has done for us that we can boldly and confidently share with others news of the salvation that only He can give. Whether we share with someone who has never heard the gospel or with a believer who is struggling with lukewarm worship, it is easy to point others to Jesus—the only One capable of transforming our lives from the inside out.

- ▶ **When have you been driven by a desire for the glory of God?**
- ▶ **How do our actions and attitudes change for the better when we are driven by the glory of God?**

HIS STORY

Jesus Washed the Disciples' Feet

Jesus' entire life was marked by service. He served the crowds and His disciples constantly, escaping only for a few short breaks to rest in prayer and contemplation. One might think this last meal would surely be the moment of His big reveal. Like the undercover boss, maybe we imagine that—having taken the form of a servant until the end of the episode—the King removes His blue-collar uniform and sits enthroned in royal robes to the amazement of His followers. That is what we might expect. Instead, the King removes His robe and kneels in yet another act of service to the amazement of His followers.

What would motivate such service? What kind of posture of heart would cause someone to lay aside privilege and preference for the sake of others? In a word—humility. Christ's service was not begrudging or selfish, but selfless and sacrificial. He sees the needs of His people and He responds.

► Is your life marked more by serving or being served?

Jesus Explained the Purpose of the Supper

When Jesus broke the bread and lifted the cup, He was painting a picture of a new reality. He crafted a visual depiction of the events that would soon occur—His body would hang between earth and air, and His blood would flow from His pierced side. His broken body: the breaking of bread. His blood poured out: the drinking of the cup. Even now, as we participate in the Lord's Supper together, we do so to remember what He sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 11:17-26).

Jesus Pointed Forward to a Future Supper with All Believers

There in that tiny upper room, what must have seemed like an offhand remark is actually a beautiful promise. Jesus would not drink of the vine again soon, but He would drink it again. Not only would He drink it again, but He would do so in the kingdom of His Father, with the disciples.

The message of the coming kingdom is a message of hope, joy, and fulfillment and is the longing of the Christian heart. So, we pray for God's kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10). We hunger and thirst for the kingdom, because we hunger and thirst for the King.

► When have you felt the deep desire, or need, for God's kingdom? For Jesus?

Essential Doctrines

Lord's Supper: *The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer, and anticipate His second coming (1 Cor. 11:26).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ How does the Lord’s Supper provide a picture of salvation in Christ?
- ▶ The Lord’s Supper can become a church ritual rather than a meaningful remembrance. What are some ways that you can cultivate a more intentional experience next time you take the Lord’s Supper with your church?
- ▶ What is the last thing you can remember waiting for in anticipation?
- ▶ Do you honestly look forward to the full arrival of God’s future kingdom? Why or why not?

YOUR MISSION

Head

Earthly kings are not typically known for their service. However, our God has established a different kingdom—one marked by humility and selflessness. Every time we partake in the Lord’s Supper now, we are constantly reminded of the servant nature of our God because the Lord’s Supper points to the sacrificial nature of Christ’s death for our sins.

- ▶ Read Mark 10:45 and Acts 17:24-25. What do these passages say about how God relates to us?
- ▶ Why do you think people often believe they must first serve God in order for Him to respond with love and grace?

Heart

The Lord’s Supper has a way of increasing our expectation of the day Jesus will return. It points our attention to and increases our anticipation of the day when we will no longer need symbolic representations of Christ’s sacrifice since Christ Himself will be with His people. Jesus mentioned the anticipation of His return, as did Paul (Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 11:26). We should never allow the Lord’s Supper to become dull or ritualistic; instead, we should allow it to guide our imaginations into what that day will be like when the people of God are gathered together for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:1-9).

- ▶ How can the Lord’s Supper encourage believers in their faith?
- ▶ How does this session give you a renewed understanding of the Lord’s Supper?

Hands

Just as the Lord’s Supper points toward the fact that Jesus’ service is not selfish, but selfless and sacrificial, we should remember our servant identity in the kingdom of God. In partaking of the Lord’s Supper, we agree with God’s mission of sharing the gospel with others. Because of Jesus’ humble service to us and because of His new covenant sacrifice, we can live lives of service as we excitedly wait for His return.

- ▶ In what areas of your life are you serving others?
- ▶ What are some practical ways you can practice service toward those in your home, church, school, and community this week?

HIS STORY

Jesus Agreed to His Mission

The account of the night in the garden of Gethsemane is filled with struggles. The disciples struggled to stay awake. Jesus struggled with the disciples over their inability to remain alert. Later, Peter struggled with the guards, and all the disciples would struggle to understand. But in the garden, the greatest struggle seemed to be within Jesus Himself. As Jacob wrestled with the Lord through the night, Jesus wrestled with the weight of His identity and mission.

Taking leave of His friends, Jesus headed off alone into the night for solitude, as was His custom (Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 5:16). But this was no customary prayer time. Jesus, the Son of God, was overwhelmed with sorrow as He faced what was before Him.

Jesus' Mission was Foretold in Scripture

No one could take Jesus' life from Him. He had made that clear before (John 10:18). If He wanted to retreat, He could pass through the midst of a crowd (Luke 4:30). If He wanted to fight, He could call down 12 legions of angels (Matt. 26:53). Anyone who can calm a storm, walk on water, and cast out demons can control a little crowd. But rather than demonstrate control through lightning or fire, Jesus exercised the self-control of restraint.

In this moment of crisis, there would be no retreat, no revolt, no rescue. Jesus was resolute in accepting what Scripture had foretold. Everything that occurred on that night was foretold, but this was no comfort for the disciples in the dark. Jesus had steadied Himself in His Father's provision and plan, but the disciples were shaken and afraid. The Old Testament message illuminated the events of this night, but the disciples failed to see it. The narrative would not end without even more fulfillment to come, but the sheep were scattered and the Shepherd was led willingly across the dark valley into the city of Jerusalem.

Jesus Affirmed the Truth about His Identity as the Messiah

When Jesus finally spoke, it was in response to a call for an oath to the living God, and He went all in. Though His response appears cryptic to us (v. 64), it most likely represents an idiom that would have been a strong confirmation of the charge.

By equating Himself with the Son of Man from Daniel 7:13-14 and referring to His descent from heaven, Jesus doubled down on the charge of blasphemy in the eyes of the Sanhedrin. At this point there was no mistake to be made. He was either blasphemous or blessed. He was the Christ or guilty of the charge of idolatry. To the leaders, the conclusion was obvious.

► What does this passage tell you about Jesus' commitment to follow through with His Father's plan?

Essential Doctrines

Christ as Propitiation: *Because of God's righteousness and holiness, humanity's sins must be atoned for in order for people to be reconciled to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ's death is the appeasement or satisfaction of God's wrath against sin. Christ's propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God's great love toward sinners (1 John 4:10), as well as the necessary payment that results from the penalty of sins (Rom. 3:26).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Why do you think the disciples were unable to make the connection between the events of this night and Jesus' prophecies of His impending betrayal and death?**
- ▶ **Why is it significant that the Old Testament prophesied many of the events surrounding the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?**
- ▶ **What are some occasions in our own lives in which we can follow in Jesus' example and show restraint even when we are persecuted or treated unfairly for our faith?**
- ▶ **What are some accusations the world makes against the church? Which of these should we reject or embrace? Why?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The “cup” was a familiar symbol of judgment and wrath in the Old Testament (Ps. 11:6; Isa. 51:17; Ezek. 23:33). Death itself would have been enough to upset even the bravest of men. The threat of torture and crucifixion was an even more imposing imminent reality. But Jesus faced something even worse. Before Him was a cup full of wrath and judgment from the holy God. By drinking it fully, Jesus would know abandonment, sin, desolation, and death.

- ▶ **What do we learn about Jesus from this biblical narrative?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus' willingness and resolve to drink “this cup” on our behalf affect you?**

Heart

The fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture is of particular relevance to Matthew as he crafted his Gospel through a Hebrew lens for a Jewish audience. Matthew demonstrated the various ways in which Jesus fulfilled Old Testament expectations and hopes. From birth to these events in the garden of Gethsemane, Matthew saw fulfillment (Matt.1:22-23; 3:15; 21:4-5). In this account, fulfillment may have occurred for a combination of Scripture passages (Ps. 55:12-14; Zech. 13:7).

- ▶ **How can the fulfillment of these prophecies inspire hope and confidence in one's faith?**
- ▶ **How can you use this knowledge of fulfilled prophecies when talking with a skeptic?**

Hands

Discussing the wrath of God isn't a popular topic in many American churches. It is a tough truth to accept. This is especially true when we consider that God's wrath against sin will be justly poured out on people who haven't found shelter under the gospel of Jesus Christ. By drinking this cup fully, Jesus experienced abandonment, sin, desolation, and death—and Jesus did that for you and me, so that we would not have to know the eternal torment of these realities.

- ▶ **Why is it important to talk about God's wrath to others even though it may be an unpopular topic of conversation?**
- ▶ **How might it dishonor Jesus and His sacrifice if we neglect to talk about God's wrath?**

HIS STORY

The Angel Invited the Women to Come and See

The process for burying Jesus was rushed because of the coming Sabbath. Prohibited by tradition from carrying out work or coming into contact with the dead on this sacred day, those who placed Jesus in the tomb quickly carried out a partial preparation that would have to do until after the day of rest.

The two Marys in this narrative were not expecting to see anything spectacular as they approached Jesus' borrowed tomb. They were looking for a conclusion and closure, but what they found was certainly more than they bargained for. In a moment, their expectations were turned upside down and hope, which had once been buried alongside their Teacher, no longer inhabited a grave.

The Women Worshiped the Risen Jesus

The message entrusted to these women was threefold. First, the angel told them to repeat what they had already been told: Jesus had been raised from the dead. That would be incredible enough, but the message of their mission continued. The angel also instructed them to proclaim that Jesus was going to Galilee, the region of the majority of His ministry. Finally, the angel tasked them with telling the disciples that they would see Him there.

► **Imagine you were with the women visiting the tomb. How would you respond to what you saw?**

► **Why do you think the women clung to Jesus when they saw Him again? How can you also cling to Jesus?**

Jesus Commanded the Women to Share the Good News

What is your first response to receiving good news? Most of us immediately seek to share the news with those we love. Whether we post it on social media, send out a mass text, or call our mom and dad, we instinctively seek to share good news with others. When the women encountered Jesus, they could not help but share the good news.

Jesus' words to the women were almost exactly the same as the angel's. Fueled by their joy and the message of resurrection, the women headed back to the city. They had received urgent news to share.

► **What are the easiest things in life for you to get excited about and want to share with others? What are some of the most difficult?**

Essential Doctrines

Glorification: *Glorification is the final stage in the process of salvation. It refers to the future time when a Christian reaches moral and spiritual perfection at the time of death or at Christ's return (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:22). Glorification also involves the physical perfection that we will have once our bodies have been resurrected. When we are glorified, we will have a fuller knowledge and understanding of God and His Word (1 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 3:20-21).*

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HIS STORY

Jesus Encountered Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus

How often has our sorrow and confusion blinded us to the presence of Jesus? That's what happened to two travelers on the day Jesus was raised from the dead.

Luke highlighted two travelers having a heated discussion about the events of the weekend—the arrest, trial, sentencing, and death of Jesus (v. 20). Jesus' crucifixion had shattered their dreams. And then, Jesus appeared.

Jesus Explained How All Scripture Points to Him

Jesus expressed disappointment that the two disciples failed to understand what the Scriptures said. The combination of "foolish" and "slow" suggests they were slow to accept by faith what the Scriptures taught about the Messiah.

The reference to Moses and other prophets referred to the Hebrew Bible—what Christians today refer to as the Old Testament. In Jesus' day, the Old Testament was read as a story in search of a conclusion. The Jewish people in Jesus' day were waiting for the last chapter in their story to begin. Essentially, Jesus said to Cleopas and the other disciple, "I am the one who brings the story to its completion. I am the focus of all the Scriptures."

Jesus Made Known His Identity

Imagine the men's surprise when they discovered that the One whose explanation of Scripture set their hearts ablaze turned out to be their risen King! The text explains that the followers' eyes were opened, and Jesus' identity was made known to them. But as suddenly as Jesus' identity was revealed, He vanished from their sight. Why did Jesus disappear when the two disciples finally recognized Him? It is likely that His disappearance created the opportunity for a meeting with the Eleven and the other disciples (Luke 24:36-49). His disappearance caused the two to return to Jerusalem and report what happened (vv. 33-35), setting the stage for Jesus' dramatic appearance to them in the next to last scene of Luke's Gospel.

► **What do you think the men meant when they said that their hearts were burning while they walked with Jesus?**

► **Why do you think Jesus made Himself known to them in this way? How would you respond if you were with these two men?**

Essential Doctrines

Illumination of Scripture: *Because of the vast difference between God's wisdom and ours, and because of humanity's sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through the process of illumination. When it comes to understanding the meaning of God's Word, Christians do not ultimately rely upon human reason in the process of interpretation, and we do not rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian's ultimate reliance is upon the work of the Spirit of God who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (Matt. 13:13-15; Mark 8:18).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Why does God allow us to endure times of sorrow and confusion? How does it affect us to know that He is with us, even if He seems hidden or disguised?**

- ▶ **How has God used His Word and His people to remind you of Jesus’ presence when you have faced distressing situations?**

- ▶ **Consider some of the famous stories in the Old Testament. In what ways do they point to Christ? Why is it important to see Bible stories in their relation to Christ?**

- ▶ **How does this story highlight the importance of personal devotion time in the Word?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The mission God has given to us is not to present the Bible as a book of virtues or as a moral improvement program. Our mission is to introduce people to the risen King who came to redeem, restore, and reconcile people to God. When Jesus makes Himself known to us, He makes God known to us. As John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him.”

- ▶ **Why is it important to not primarily see the Bible as a big book of good behaviors we should live by, but instead as God’s story of saving humanity through His Son?**

- ▶ **If Jesus makes God known to us, and if the Bible is the best means to learn about Jesus and His teaching, then what is ultimately at stake if we neglect the Scriptures?**

Heart

These disciples rightly captured what happens when we correctly understand the Bible when they said, “Weren’t our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). For the disciples and countless Christians over the centuries, understanding the Bible and seeing how all of the stories and events point to Jesus sets our hearts on fire, creating a love and passion for the Word and a hunger for more of it.

- ▶ **Share about a time when, like the disciples, the Word stirred your heart.**

- ▶ **What are some ways you can cultivate a passion and hunger for God’s Word in your own life?**

Hands

Note how the disciples on the road to Emmaus quickly went to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. An encounter with Jesus is not meant to be kept secret. It leads to mission. When Jesus reveals Himself to us, He expects us to spread His glory and fame through our witness to others.

- ▶ **Why was it natural for these two disciples to share the news of Jesus’ resurrection?**

- ▶ **What can help our evangelism feel more natural?**

HIS STORY

Jesus Offers His Peace

It had been a devastating weekend for Jesus' disciples. The One they expected to restore the kingdom to Israel had been crucified (Acts 1:6). But on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene announced to them that she had seen Jesus (John 20:18). John's account of this astounding appearance focuses on three statements Jesus made to His disciples. The first was a greeting that recalled Jesus' promise to give them a peace that would overcome their troubled hearts and their fear (John 14:27; 16:33).

► **How does the peace of God guard our hearts against fear and anxiety? When have you experienced God's peace even though you were facing the troubles of the world?**

Jesus Sends Out His Disciples

Here we have the second statement Jesus made to His disciples. Jesus prepared His disciples for this statement in two ways. First, He showed them His hands and side. The scars on His hands and side were marks of His suffering and His victory. He had overcome death, which was exactly why His disciples were overjoyed when they saw Him.

Second, Jesus repeated His greeting of peace. With this, He offered them this a stunning commission: Just as Jesus was sent by God, Jesus would also send His disciples out into the world. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus frequently referred to Himself as One sent by God. In alignment with that sending, He sends His followers.

► **How does Jesus' victory over sin and death and His promise of peace encourage you as you live on mission?**

Jesus Gives His Spirit

The mission Jesus gave to His followers is not doable without help. The night before Jesus was crucified, He promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to guide and help them on their mission.

At first, the timing seems confusing. It appears that Jesus gave His disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of His resurrection. Yet, about forty days after His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). This gift came on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, enabling the disciples to carry out the mission they had been given (Acts 2:1-47).

The key to understanding verse 23 is the detail that Jesus "breathed on them." This is most likely some sort of symbolic action. D. A. Carson suggests that the exhaling and command to receive the Spirit "are best understood as a kind of acted parable pointing forward to the full endowment still to come (though in the past for John's readers)."¹

1. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 65

Essential Doctrines

God in Three Persons: *While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Phil. 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each person is distinct from the others (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine; departing from it is to abandon orthodox Christianity.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ Why is it important for people to experience the peace that only God can bring?
- ▶ Why is it important to remember that, as Christ’s ambassadors, we are on a mission of offering peace?
- ▶ What are some steps a believer can take in order to live as a disciple who is sent on God’s mission by Jesus?
- ▶ What adjustments might your church consider making to be more focused on God’s mission?

YOUR MISSION

Head

The gift of the Spirit is linked closely with forgiveness for sins. Forgiveness is a great blessing of the gospel that the Spirit empowers us to proclaim. But what exactly is the forgiveness of sins? It is God’s act of blotting out our sins and not counting our trespasses against us (Acts 3:19). The basis for this forgiveness is Jesus’ shed blood and sacrifice on the cross. Jesus’ death makes it possible for God to satisfy His love and the demands of His justice.

- ▶ What roles does the Spirit play in the life of a Christian?
- ▶ If the Spirit is vital to the life of a believer, what are some ways we can express more of our dependence upon Him?

Heart

The peace Jesus promised to His disciples is rooted in the Old Testament and comes from the Hebrew term *shalom*. It means much more than the absence of conflict. Instead, it refers to a condition of prosperity, welfare, completeness, and wholeness. In essence, it is a state of everything being right, just as God intended it to be. It is a peace that the world is incapable of giving—one only that can be given by God Himself.

- ▶ Share about a specific time when you felt overwhelmed with the peace of Christ.
- ▶ How does knowing God’s peace strengthen your faith in Him?

Hands

It’s always worth reminding each other that we, as Christians, are a sent people who are being formed in the image of our sending God and our suffering Savior. This information should lead us to represent Jesus in His mission—as we go to the people in our schools, communities, and all other networks of relationships—to proclaim the gospel of peace.

- ▶ Why do you think Christians don’t see themselves as being ambassadors for Christ in this world?
- ▶ What are some common distractions in life that may cause us to neglect our mission? How can we overcome these distractions?

HIS STORY

Thomas Doubted Jesus' Resurrection

For some undisclosed reason, Thomas was not present when the risen King appeared to His disciples on the day He was raised from the dead. When the other disciples claimed that they had seen the Lord, Thomas remained unconvinced and established a condition for belief. The condition was physical evidence. He needed to see and even touch the wounds of the risen Lord.

Even believers in Jesus have moments of doubt. In fact, it has even been noted that there are different kinds of doubts, and that these different types of doubts can vary from person to person.

Thomas Witnessed the Resurrected Jesus

Jesus came through locked doors and offered the same greeting of peace, just as He did the previous Sunday. Then, He turned to Thomas and issued a challenge—maybe even a mild rebuke.

The preliminary part of the challenge was for Thomas to handle the evidence, thus seeing for himself that his condition for belief had been met. Jesus' offer provided proof that the "Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

The core part of the challenge Jesus issued to Thomas was this: "Don't be an unbeliever, but a believer." Thomas had been a loyal disciple of Jesus up to that point, but he needed to exercise faith in the crucified and risen King. Throughout the Gospel of John, we see that faith (belief) in Jesus is necessary for receiving God's salvation and gift of eternal life.

► **Why do you think Jesus singled out Thomas when He appeared to His disciples this second time?**

Thomas Confessed that Jesus is Lord and God

Thomas' response was amazing—it was one of conviction and confession. His confession not only displayed faith in Jesus, the risen King, but also revealed who Jesus Christ is. Notice Thomas' use of the terms "Lord" and "God" so close together. It's important for us to note that in the Old Testament, "Lord" and "God" frequently stand side-by-side with reference to Yahweh. Simply put: Jesus is none other than God Himself!

But how do we understand Jesus' response in verse 29? While Jesus affirmed Thomas' faith, He also seemed to issue a slight rebuke. Or did He?

The second part of Jesus' statement is what we call a beatitude—a statement of blessing. Rather than rebuking Thomas, Jesus anticipated a time when He would ascend to heaven and no longer be physically present on the earth. Once that happened, all those who believe would do so without the benefit of having seen their resurrected Lord.

► **We may not physically see Jesus and believe, but we have the evidence recorded in His Word. Which do you think would be easier, to be like Thomas and be able to base your belief off of physical sight? Or to be able to believe without seeing? Explain.**

Essential Doctrines

Faith: *Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.*

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The Point: Jesus forgives past failures and offers the opportunity to follow Him once again.

HIS STORY

Jesus Provided for the Disciples

In Matthew 4:18-20, Peter and several other disciples left their nets to follow Jesus. In this passage, we find that the disciples had returned to fishing. The Gospel of John did not give a reason for this decision or tell us that this decision was inappropriate. However, it does not seem to be the response we would expect from disciples Jesus had sent on a mission.

Jesus would have a conversation with Peter eventually, but His first priority was to provide breakfast to His disciples. This is a significant act. By feeding them breakfast, Jesus reassured His disciples of His presence, met their physical needs, and served them as He did before He went to the cross.

► **How have you experienced the reassuring presence of Jesus in your life? What has Jesus done to remind you that He is with you and cares for your needs?**

Jesus Called Peter to Follow Him

Jesus began by restoring Peter with a “triple commission” to match Peter’s “triple denial” (John 18:15-27; 21:15-17). Three times, Jesus asked if Peter loved Him.

Jesus’ commission to Peter, His repentant follower, was to care for Jesus’ followers as a shepherd cares for his sheep. This was a huge commission. Jesus, the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep (John 10:10-16), entrusted this responsibility to Peter. In essence, Peter would demonstrate his love for Jesus by caring for Jesus’ followers.

Jesus Taught Peter to not Focus on Others, but on Him

This call to consistent discipleship until his death as a martyr prompted Peter to ask Jesus a question. His question is one we tend to ask when we reflect on the difficulties we face for following and serving our risen King. The question is: “What about him? What about her?” The conversation between Jesus and Peter continued, but this time, Peter asked the question.

Years later, the Apostle Peter wrote about how we can follow Jesus and serve Him even during times of intense suffering. In his first New Testament letter, he challenged believers to follow Jesus’ lead and entrust themselves to God, the One who judges justly (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Essential Doctrines

Imputation: *When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed or transferred to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ’s righteousness was imputed to us (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins, but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them (Rom. 4:6).*

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HIS STORY

Jesus Affirmed That All Authority Belongs to Him

The disciples went to Galilee to see the One they had been waiting for, the One they thought they had lost forever. As Jesus predicted, they worshiped when they saw Him. However, verse 17 also says that some of the disciples doubted.

It is not clear whether some of the Eleven doubted or whether a larger crowd followed the disciples to Galilee and some of that crowd doubted. We cannot be certain of the answer to that question.

What is important is for us to see that doubt and hardness of heart were present in that moment.

Jesus wasn't shaken by their unbelief, and He wasn't discouraged. He was focused on the mission He would pass on to His disciples. But before He shared His commission with His disciples, He established the strength behind it—Himself. Jesus received complete authority and power from God the Father.

► **What are some other places in Scripture where we see Jesus possessing divine authority?**

Jesus Commissioned His Disciples

The disciples were instructed to go (Matt. 28:19). This was not a suggestion. Jesus wasn't telling the disciples that maybe they should go, or they could go if they could squeeze it into their schedules. Jesus used an imperative, a command, an order to be obeyed. Jesus, the risen King, commanded them to go.

For the disciples, going would mean being scattered among the peoples and nations of the world, and for many of us, it means the same. Jesus' call is for a multi-ethnic, cross-cultural focus of missionaries that may require leaving home and the known to travel into foreign lands of the unknown. But the Lord didn't tell us here exactly where to go. He didn't demand that we all leave home; He simply said to go and make disciples of all nations.

Jesus Encouraged His Disciples for the Mission Ahead

Jesus commanded the disciples to go, to act—preaching the gospel to all nations and baptizing believers in the name of our trinitarian God. But we see in the next verse that this isn't the end of the work.

That's why the Great Commission isn't only about evangelism—it's also about discipleship. God promises to finish the good work He begins (Phil. 1:6), and He instructs us to participate in that work through learning about and obeying Him. Christians are further instructed to disciple the disciple, and as we see in these passages, no one is exempt from teaching others (Matt. 28:20). We are all called to go and disciple believers in Christ.

Essential Doctrines

Mission of the Church: *The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What fears do you have that could keep you from obeying the mission Jesus has given to us?**
- ▶ **How does the reality of Jesus' authority over all of heaven and earth overcome those fears?**
- ▶ **How might we unintentionally downplay the importance of baptism as a part of the Great Commission?**
- ▶ **What are some practical ways you can teach others Jesus' commands and encourage obedience?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The disciples were commanded to go and make other disciples. By biblical definition, a disciple is a follower of Jesus, someone who learns from Him in order to live like Him. So, these Jesus-followers were commanded to go and find other people to become Jesus-followers. In other words, even though salvation belongs to the Lord and only He can save, He allows us to play a wonderful part in salvation. We do this by sharing the gospel, through discipleship of new believers, and by equipping them with a Christian worldview.

- ▶ **How have you experienced discipleship from a mature believer in your own life?**
- ▶ **How can we encourage one another toward making disciples?**

Heart

Our temptation not to share with others is often rooted in fear: What should I say? What if they won't accept me? How will I look in their eyes? What if the response is violence? When Jesus is the focus and the message, we can rest from our fear. We don't need to fear human beings because, Jesus instructed: "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

- ▶ **What are some ways we can unintentionally make the message of the gospel about us instead of about Jesus?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus' authority help us when we feel fearful?**

Hands

Like most people, we become busy with life and our own schedules, and our busyness can lead us to forget our ultimate mission. We have a great treasure in the gospel. We have the best and only news this world needs. We also have been given the power to share it by the grace of God through His Holy Spirit, who is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to always be with us. Let's ask God for opportunities to go and make disciples of all nations and pray for our faithfulness and boldness as we share about our risen King—Jesus Christ.

- ▶ **What places have you gone in order to share the gospel and make disciples?**
- ▶ **How can your group/church work together and support one another in this shared mission to go and make disciples of all nations?**

HIS STORY

Jesus Promised the Disciples the Gift of the Holy Spirit

Following Jesus' resurrection and before His ascension into heaven, as Jesus prepared the disciples for their ministry in His name, He ordered them to wait in Jerusalem for the Father's promise to come (Acts 1:4).

Jesus described to the disciples the Father's promise in Acts 1:5. He informed them that they would soon receive the gift of the third Person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit. This was the Father's remarkable promise—the gift of the Holy Spirit—a baptism that would forever define their identity as the followers of Jesus.

► **What is the most difficult part about waiting on God?**

► **What was so amazing about God's promise to the disciples in this passage? How does this promise affect you today?**

Jesus Reminded Them of Their Mission

The kingdom of God is associated with Jesus Himself. So, the kingdom had been with the disciples and would continue to be with them to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Only God the Father knows the day and time of Jesus' return, when the fullness of the kingdom comes and the restoration of God's people and all of His creation will be complete.

Instead of allowing the disciples to focus on the details of the kingdom, which they couldn't know, Jesus redirected their attention to the task at hand—it was a time for mission. Jesus had laid out the details of His mission for them in Matthew 28: Jesus' disciples are to go and make disciples of all nations. Before He ascended, Jesus expounded on the mission He previously shared.

Jesus Ascended to the Father

The fact that the disciples were given the privilege to watch the ascension is one thing, but in God's kindness to them, they were reminded once again that the Father was with them, His promises are true, and Jesus would come again just as He had left. He departed in a cloud, and He will return on the clouds of heaven.

When Jesus was gone from their sight, the disciples traveled to a home, gathered with other men and women, and waited and prayed in unity. They devoted themselves to one another and to prayer over what was about to happen. They were not anxious about the mission given to them because they knew God's promises were true.

Essential Doctrines

Moral Influence Theory of Atonement: *According to this theory, Christ's sacrifice should be seen as a demonstration of God's love, a display that produces a change of attitude within humanity. This theory falls short of all Christ accomplished on the cross, since it leaves out God's wrath against sinners and His requirement of satisfaction for sin. Still, it does remind us that the cross is the greatest example of God's love, and this love must provoke gratitude and praise on our behalf.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Why are we prone to overlook our need of God’s Spirit in our lives?**
- ▶ **Like the disciples not knowing God’s plan or timing regarding the kingdom, how do you handle the mysteries of life (what is God’s plan, how is God working, etc.)?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus’ response to the disciples in this passage encourage you regarding the unknowns in life?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus’ interceding on your behalf encourage you as you face these unknowns?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The disciples could wait confidently for the promise’s fulfillment because God’s words are true, pure, and sure. When God says He is going to do something, He will. His promises aren’t like our promises. We might make a promise to do something or to be somewhere, but we may break that promise in order to do something else or be somewhere else. Of course, our promises aren’t always broken deliberately or out of spite; there are times when our circumstances lead us to break promises previously made. But God isn’t governed by circumstances. When He makes a promise, it will be fulfilled.

- ▶ **How does our perspective of earthly promises impact how we view God’s promises?**
- ▶ **What can get in the way of your belief that God will be faithful to His promises?**

Heart

When Jesus departed, the disciples didn’t try to come up with a plan right away. So often preparation for us looks busy, intense, and maybe even a bit frantic, but not for Jesus’ disciples. They waited in anticipation of the Spirit and prayed. Their hearts were settled, and they were unified in their belief, resolve, and love. So they waited, rested, and prayed for what was to come. Jesus gave them the mission, and the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit would work powerfully through them—and us—to accomplish it.

- ▶ **What are some areas of life where you are tempted to have an unsettled heart and lack of faith in God and His promises?**
- ▶ **How should we respond when faced with such times?**

Hands

Jesus told the disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them—when He baptized them with the Holy Spirit. This isn’t just any power, it’s power from the third Person of the Trinity—the power of God. This same power brought Jesus out of the tomb alive. The Holy Spirit helps Christians in many ways as they strive for holiness, obedience, and faithfulness to Jesus’ mission. One way, as the disciples experienced, was His enabling power to boldly speak and proclaim the gospel.

- ▶ **What are some examples of the Holy Spirit’s power that you have seen in Scripture?**
- ▶ **How does the reality of being empowered by the Holy Spirit impact the way we carry out the Great Commission?**

The Point: Christians thank the Lord, sing His praises, and proclaim His greatness in all the earth.

HIS STORY

Thank the Lord for His Mercy and Comfort

Isaiah’s song refers to a “day” that for him was yet to come, but it was not a reference without context. In the first 11 chapters of Isaiah, “day” was used multiple times with positive and negative implications, depending on where you would stand on that day. Imagine you’re a child again and your dad is coming home from work. Depending upon your behavior toward your mom that day—respectful obedience or disrespectful rebellion—you know whether your dad’s arrival is something to be happily anticipated or dreaded. In a similar way, for the proud enemies of God, the “day” is a day of judgment and humiliation (Isa. 2:5-17). At the same time, for the remnant of the Lord’s people, it is a day of preservation and salvation, even a full restoration from exile (Isa. 11:10-16). The Old Testament prophets often called this “the Day of the Lord.”

► **How does your view of this song of thanksgiving change, knowing that we have all been under God’s wrath?**

Take Joy Together in the Lord’s Promise of Salvation

The Lord is the God of mercy and comfort, turning His anger away from sinners and taking them into His arms as beloved children. We give thanks to the Lord because He does this for individuals—for you and for me—so we will sing of His salvation. But if our singing stops there, if we only confess, “God has become my salvation,” to ourselves in the mirror, then we are missing out on an inevitable result of God’s salvation—the joyful community of the redeemed.

God, in His justice and loving discipline, promised to remove all of His people’s water sources because of their rebellion and sin (Isa. 3:1). God did this to drive the people to repentance and to find their joy in Him alone rather than in the idols they had created. The rain would return when the people returned to the Lord, not just with sacrifices but with a whole heart set upon obedience to Him. No wonder water was an appropriate metaphor for salvation from the Lord.

Proclaim the Glory and Greatness of God All over the Earth

The individual gave thanks to God for His salvation in verse 1, but here the saved individuals who have gathered together also encouraged one another to give thanks to God and publicly honor His name. The picture of praise in this chapter flows like this: *I thank the Lord that He has saved me! Hey, you are here with me, so you have been saved too. Thank the Lord that He saved you!* But the praise of God can’t stop there. This salvation from God is so great, gracious, and kind that everyone needs to hear about it, so let’s go tell more people—even those who haven’t heard about our God and His salvation!

► **How does thanking and praising God with other believers encourage us to go to those who do not know God and His salvation?**

Essential Doctrines

Body of Christ: *The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ’s representatives here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ’s ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the interconnectedness of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12:12).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Isaiah used water as a metaphor describing God's salvation. What are some metaphors from our culture that we could use to describe salvation from the Lord?**
- ▶ **How can we make the community of faith a priority in our lives and in the church?**
- ▶ **What should we do when we find that our joy in salvation is decreasing?**
- ▶ **What works of God in your life can you make known among the people of the earth?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

"The Day of the Lord" was a day of God's decisive action in the world. In Isaiah's immediate context, the "day" addressed the destruction that would come upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel by Assyria, as well as their attempt to destroy Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Isa. 7:17-25). Truth be told, there have been many "Days of the Lord" in Scripture, but there is also one "Day of the Lord" to end all "Days of the Lord." The apostle Peter described this ultimate day: the second coming of Christ (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Christians long for that day.

- ▶ **What are some reasons people may not eagerly look forward to the "Day of the Lord"?**
- ▶ **What do you think are some reasons Christians long for that day?**

Heart

The God who pays on our behalf what we rightfully owe is One worthy of our full trust. We never need to be afraid of Him because He Himself takes care of our punishment; all that is left is loving, purposeful comfort and discipline that shape us into His image. We also should not be afraid in our life circumstances because our salvation is found in the God who created and governs all things. He infuses us with His strength and power to do what is right, and He works in our hearts to become the delight of our hearts, that His praise would forever be the song we sing.

- ▶ **How would you explain the relationship between thanksgiving and praise in your own words?**
- ▶ **What is your favorite song of praise and thanksgiving to sing to the God of your salvation? Why?**

Hands

If we are saved in Christ, it is because others who experienced His salvation decided to go and share about His glorious works. If we want to worship Jesus rightly, then we must go to all the world and share about His glorious works in our own lives (Matt. 28:18-20). According to the pattern of thanksgiving and praise for salvation in Isaiah 12, worship must lead to evangelism.

- ▶ **How would you explain the connection between worship and evangelism in your own words?**
- ▶ **How can we encourage one another to share the gospel with the nations?**