



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**

Teach Me How to Pray

Daily Scripture Readings for

March 21 - April 17

WEEK 5: FORGIVENESS

Monday, March 21 - Luke 23:33-34

Could you pray like Jesus prayed while enduring what he was enduring? Could you be praying for your oppressors while they were mocking and killing you? Could you be thinking about someone else while your life was being taken away?

I must admit that I did not know much about apartheid or South African history until I recently read a commentary on Revelation from a South African theologian. I was appalled with how recent this history was, but I was also in awe of the faith of Black (and a minority of White) Christians in South Africa who stood up to the injustices occurring. Pastors and lay people were willing to go to jail for decades because of their advocacy for racial equality in the country. Their fight was mostly a peaceful fight, and their fight involved praying for their oppressors.

Do you have the love for others that it takes to pray for forgiveness for your enemies? Do you love like Jesus loved while he was hanging on the cross?

Maybe you are uncertain how you can do that. You don't have enemies and no one (I hope!) is trying to kill you. Maybe our prayer is different from Jesus because our relationship with God is different than Jesus. Nevertheless, we need to pray for those who give us difficulty. We pray for "enemies" near to us and on the other side of the world. We pray that God forgives them. Essentially, we pray that they come to faith in Jesus. That's the only way to receive forgiveness right? It only comes through a relationship with God. Let us pray that they are forgiven because God reveals himself to them and they ask for that forgiveness. Would you commit to praying for non-Christians near and far? Can you pray this week that there is revival across this world as people realize they need forgiveness from God?

Tuesday, March 22 - Luke 6:27-38

Oh how much we try to weasel our way out of following these teachings of Jesus. One of my seminary professors told a story of when he was a child at a Christian elementary school. One day while he was in P.E., the teacher used Luke 6:29 as the devotional verse for the day...but he added to it. (Side note: it's never a good idea to add your own verses to the Bible). The teacher told the class that "if someone strikes you, turn the other cheek. If they strike you again, then punch them in the face."

Oh how we try to make the teachings of Jesus more palatable to our human desires. Jesus does not give any limit to the love and forgiveness to others. Instead, we are to be merciful just as the Father is merciful. And how great is the Father's mercy upon us! God's mercy and forgiveness is like a full cup of flour, pressed down and running over. God's mercy and forgiveness is like the extra chocolate chips you throw into the pancake or cookie batter. God calls us to give as we have received.

There is also this warning at the end of our passage. It is not a command to give as we have received, but a warning that we will receive as we have given. Will God take away forgiveness if we do not extend forgiveness to others? Absolutely Not! God never takes forgiveness away from his children. The basic premise Jesus is sharing is that you get as you give from other people. Those who give mercy and forgiveness will receive mercy and forgiveness from others. Are you not more willing to be nicer to people who have been nice to you? Are you not more willing to help those who have helped you before? Of course, this is not where we are supposed to be as we should love and help even our enemies, but the point stands. In the world, people are willing to extend forgiveness to those who have extended forgiveness to them. There should be no limit to the mercy and forgiveness we give to others. Let the measuring cup overflow!

Wednesday, March 23 - James 3:1-12

Have you ever wanted to take back words that you have said? There is a feature on most email servers which let's you do this, but there's a catch. When I send an email, there is a little box in the bottom left corner with the word "undo." Should I send an email and realize I should not have sent it, I have 10 seconds to click undo. If I click the button, it does not send the email. But if I wait too long, the button is gone, the email is sent, and there is nothing I can do to retrieve my words.

In life, we don't even have the 10 seconds to undo the words we say. Once words are spoken, they cannot be taken back as much as we would like to. Once they have escaped your mouth, there is no grabbing them out of the air or out of the ears of the people who heard.

This is the same message James gives at the beginning of chapter 3. We can tame lions, but we can't tame the tongue. Let's talk more about the dangers of the tongue at Prayer Meeting today.

Thursday, March 24 - Matthew 6:14-15

Woah, woah, woah...what's going on here? Is God's forgiveness contingent on us forgiving others? No! God's forgiveness is freely given.

However...

God's forgiveness is freely given to those who open their hearts to receive the forgiveness of God. If one's heart is not ready to forgive others, that could mean that his heart is not ready to receive forgiveness. Your heart cannot receive what your heart is unwilling to give. We ask God to forgive our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. There is an assumption being made that if we are bold enough to approach the throne of God and ask for forgiveness, we have also forgiven people who have wronged us. If we want the God of heaven and earth, Creator of the world, to forgive us of the wrongs we have committed against Him, then we better be working on forgiving others for the wrongs they have

committed against us. Tomorrow's parable illustrates the importance of forgiving others perfectly.

Who do you need to forgive? Who have you been holding a grudge against? Reach out to that person today and forgive them. It's what your Father requires of you.

Friday, March 25 - Matthew 18:23-35

For much of my life, when I heard this parable preached, it seemed so outrageous. How could this guy not forgive the debt when he had just been forgiven a much greater debt? There is an amazing disparity between 10,000 talents and 100 denarii. By my calculations, 100 denarii is roughly 0.000002% of 10,000 talents. Again, by my calculations, 10,000 talents is equal to 45 million denarii. When making this comparison, it seems absurd for the man to not forgive the smaller debt.

But look at the amounts of money closer. If your Bible has notes like mine, there's a footnote which says one denarius was the usual day's wage. So, 100 denarii is 100 days worth of work. One hundred denarii is almost 4 months worth of work. How many of us would be willing to forgive a debt that large? In today's dollar amount, we are talking tens of thousands of dollars. You gonna just write that off and say "don't worry about it"?

That's the point of the parable. We should be willing to forgive that large of a debt because God has forgiven us of an amount laughably higher than that. But many of us are not, even though God has forgiven us of so much more. We force others to live up to a standard that we cannot. We relish in the forgiveness of God, and we promote the forgiveness of God to others, but we are unwilling to forgive others. We must forgive others from our heart. We cannot enjoy our forgiveness without spreading that forgiveness to the world.

Saturday, March 26 - Joshua 5:9-12

How blessed do you think the people felt to eat the produce of the land instead of the manna from heaven?

Sunday, March 27 - Psalm 130

WEEK 6: WHY GOD?

Monday, March 28 - Mark 15:33-34

In this series on prayer, we have been learning from Jesus' prayer life about how we should pray. What we can learn from Jesus when he utters these words on the cross, is that asking God why is ok. Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:1 which invokes the picture of that entire psalm. "Why have you forsaken me God? Why are you so far away from me? My mouth is dry, they divide my clothes, they stare and gloat. Come to my aid Lord!"

There are so many times in our life when events occur which don't make sense or events happen which are worse than we expect. It comforts me to know that Jesus asked "why?" because that tells me I can ask "why?" We don't have to accept everything as it is. We can ask "why?" As long as we also remember the rest of Psalm 22. "You who fear the Lord, praise Him! (v. 23). He rules over the nations (v. 28). I shall live for him (v. 29)." You can ask God "why" when you are fully committed to Him. We can ask God "why" when it is part of a more robust prayer life.

This is the last week of our focus on prayer. Take some time today or later this week to evaluate your prayer life. Are you praying like Jesus? What have you learned from Jesus about how to pray? How has your prayer life changed over the last several weeks? Consider those questions as you conclude your time with God today.

Tuesday, March 29 - Job 13:20-28

This passage in Job echoes Jesus' prayer yesterday. Job is pouring out his soul and just wants to know why? Tell me what I did to deserve this misery. Why are you doing this God? I am no match for you; I'm a windblown leaf and dry chaff. Job is despondent in his prayer crying out for the Lord to intervene. And what does God do in this moment? What did God do when Jesus cried out from the cross? Stayed silent.

God doesn't respond to Job until much later in the story; God remains further away from Jesus than at any point in Jesus' existence. The hard truth is that when we pray to God, sometimes God does not answer right away. Not because God is not listening, God surely is. No, God does not respond for reasons we may never comprehend. We may tell ourselves stories of why God is waiting, but we will never truly know.

What can you do when God remains silent? Keep praying. Hold on firm to the promises of God in Scripture. God is listening even if He is not acting the way *you* want Him to. Declare your trust in God. Job trusted in God even when he was praying like this; Jesus trusted in God even when he was praying like this. Do you continue to trust in God when life makes you ask "why?"

Wednesday, March 30 - James 3:13-4:10

Wisdom from above brings peace; "wisdom" from below causes war. All of the tragedy in this world could be avoided if we just sought wisdom from God instead of making decisions based on the selfish ambition of the heart. It seems so simple yet why do people, even Christians, not seek God's wisdom? Pride. We don't like asking for help. We think it is showing weakness to ask for help. Seeking wisdom from above means humbling ourselves, submitting ourselves to God's will, and not living life as arrogant, prideful, selfish people.

What are some ways we can guard against pride and selfish ambition? How can we "pray correctly" as 4:3 seems to indicate we do? How can we be

proficient in “submitting ourselves to God?” I hope we can discuss all of these questions during Prayer Meeting and help each other grow in the faith.

Thursday, March 31 - Revelation 6:9-11

We're not here today to interpret what verse 11 means, but we are reading this passage as the Lamb opens the fifth seal to feel the plight of those who have been martyred. Those who have been martyred are crying out to the holy Lord for judgment against those who killed them. And the Lord's response? Wait.

Wait might be a harder answer to hear from God than yes or no. Waiting creates anticipation and anxiety. I think about waiting for a vacation. We will always have a countdown at the house when we get within a month until the day we leave. Every day, one of the kids will change the countdown and we all get excited as our vacation gets closer and closer. This type of waiting is actually not too bad. There's a known destination. A known time when you will leave. But then, there's another type of waiting when you are about to go on vacation... Your flight is delayed, and you have no idea when you will depart. The unknown is so frustrating. Waiting an indeterminate length of time is unbearable.

The martyrs in Revelation 6 are told to wait a little longer. What can we do when we pray to God and told to wait? Should we throw a temper-tantrum like a three year old? Of course not, though many of us do exactly that. What we do when God tells us to wait is we trust in God's timing. We know that God is good and God is holy. We know that God wants what is best for us. So we trust that God knows what He is doing. We trust that God has a better plan than we do. And we do exactly what the martyrs are told to do in verse 11: rest a little longer.

Friday, April 1 - 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

Don't believe anything you read today (ok, you can believe this devotion). It's April Fools Day, the day where people like to play tricks on one another. One year, Taco Bell made an announcement that they had purchased the Liberty Bell.

Many people believed them. People called congress demanding that the Taco Liberty Bell not become a thing. That same year, Ford got in on the joke saying they bought the Lincoln Memorial and were renaming it the Lincoln-Mercury Memorial. Again, people with no sense of humor and gullible written on their forehead believed them and were not amused.

People will tell themselves crazy stories and fool themselves about what comes after death. Some think that if they are good enough they will gain admittance to heaven. Others think that there is no heaven or hell, so you might as well live for now. Still others think that God will let everyone into heaven no matter what.

This passage tells us differently. We are told of our resurrected bodies which have imperishability. We are told of the victory which God gave us through his Son. We are told that these perishable bodies cannot enter heaven. It is only through the death of Christ which we can receive eternal salvation and proudly proclaim that awesome saying in verses 54-55: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting." "Thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" And that is no joke.

Saturday, April 2 - Isaiah 43:16-21

What "new things" are you excited about that the Lord is doing in your life?

Sunday, April 3 - Psalm 131

A JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Monday, April 4 - Mark 11:1-11

We begin to prepare for Palm Sunday this week. When reading this story of the Triumphal Entry, verse 11 struck me in a way I haven't noticed before. Jesus and the disciples did not do anything in Jerusalem except arrive in Jerusalem.

The whole point of Sunday was to announce their arrival and parade into Jerusalem. Why is Jesus doing this? Why not just wait until Monday to go to Jerusalem? What's the point?

Verse 1 references the point. Jesus was "near the Mount of Olives." Zechariah 14 gives a final prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord. On the Day of the Lord, when the Lord comes to take His throne in Jerusalem, he comes from the east...from the Mount of Olives. The Triumphal Entry is performance art where Jesus is making it crystal clear that He is the Lord. He is riding on a donkey as Zechariah 9 mentions. He comes into the city to save the people from the forces of evil. And this procession deserves to be the only thing that Jesus does this day. This announcement of the Lord's arrival as promised in Zechariah is so important that it requires being the only event on Jesus' schedule that day.

Don't let anyone ever tell you that Jesus was just a great teacher and did not think he was the Son of God. He knew prophecy and went out of his way to fulfill it. Praise God that He came to this earth to save the people!

Tuesday, April 5 - Mark 11:12-25

On the next day, Jesus goes to the Temple and throws out the money changers. This story is surrounded by two parts of another story about the fig tree. The fig tree ends up being a real-life metaphor for the Temple. The fig tree's season for producing has passed and thus is condemned by God. The Temple's season for producing has passed and thus is condemned by God. Jesus quotes passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah as he drives out the money changers. When Isaiah and Jeremiah were prophesying, they were prophesying the destruction of the First Temple during the exile. Jesus uses the same words to prophesy that Jesus, himself, will replace the Temple.

Jesus' answer to Peter starting in verse 22 tells us what the new Temple Jesus is building is to be built on: faith and prayer. The Jewish leaders did not

build their Temple on faith and prayer; instead, they were focused on Law and tradition. That focus led them away from Jesus and into destruction.

As we begin to enter the final days before Holy Week, let us consider our hearts. Are we like the chief priests, focused on law and tradition, or are we focused on prayer and faith in God?

Wednesday, April 6 - James 4:11-5:6

Three warnings are given to the people in these verses: a warning about judging others, a warning about making plans, and a warning about relying on riches. All of these sins miss the point of trusting in God. It is God who is the judge, not us. It is God who organizes the world, not us. It is God who provides for the future, not us.

When we presume that we are the judge, organizer, and provider, we are arrogant and selfish. One of the chief messages of James is to not be arrogant but to trust in God. To seek wisdom from above not “wisdom” from below, as we discussed last week. Do you trust in the Lord to be the judge of others? Do you trust in the Lord to be the organizer of your life? Do you trust in God to provide for your future? Which one of these do you have the hardest time with? Let’s discuss this more at Prayer Meeting today.

Thursday, April 7 - Matthew 22:1-14

What a weird parable. First, a certain number of people were invited, but they declined. So, the king sent a second invitation and not only did they decline, the people killed the messengers. Then, the king sent an army to kill them and burn down the city. Then, the king invited anyone who wanted to come to the banquet. It was full of guests. But one man was not wearing the right clothes, so the king had him bound and thrown out into the dark. What...is...going...on?

Here’s one possible interpretation that makes sense to me. The first invitation represents Israel before the exile. Israel ignored the invitation to be part

of the Kingdom of Heaven and the First Temple was destroyed. The second invitation is to Israel after the exile but again Israel ignored the invitation that God was giving and killed the ones who were sent to extend the invitation (John the Baptist and Jesus perhaps?). So now, God is opening the Kingdom of Heaven to all people no matter if they are Jew or Gentile. Anyone who wants to become part of the Kingdom is invited!

But what about the guy who came but wasn't wearing the right clothes? These are those who want to come, but do not want to be sanctified. What we need to realize is the Kingdom of Heaven is inclusive and exclusive. All who want to come may come, but that means leaving the old rags behind and putting on the wedding clothes. We leave the old self behind and become a new creation.

Justification and sanctification are two sides of the same coin. Conversion and discipleship go hand-in-hand. Jesus is not your Savior if you do not also want him to be your Lord, Master, Boss. I like to imagine that the wedding clothes were provided for the guests. The king has taken in whomever wants to come and given them everything they need for the banquet. And this man is the one who wants to come to dinner and not get changed. He likes the idea of the banquet but is comfortable in how he is living life. The parable is clear: if you have not given up the old rags for the new clothes, you have no place at the banquet. If you do not repent of your sin, there is no forgiveness. May we all be disciples of our Lord, give up the dirty rags of sin, and enter into the banquet as those who are being set apart for the Kingdom of heaven.

Friday, April 8 - Matthew 21:33-46

This is a similar parable as yesterday with a similar point: the Pharisees have disregarded the will of God. Now, Israel is being passed over for a new people who God will raise up from whomever will produce for the Kingdom.

Are we producing the fruit of the Kingdom? Are you growing spiritually so that you can then live that spiritual life out in the world? Please notice that Jesus

does not say produce fruits *for* the Kingdom. He says the fruits of the Kingdom. That makes me think of characteristics such as the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23. Are we being formed by God so that fruits of the Kingdom are growing out of our souls? Evaluate yourself today. What type of life are you living, and is it worthy of the Kingdom of God?

Saturday, April 9 - Isaiah 50:4-11

How have you seen the Lord helping you in the past month? How have you seen the Lord helping your church?

Sunday, April 10 - Luke 19:28-40

EASTER WEEK

Monday, April 11 - Isaiah 42:1-9

For Holy Week this year, we will be reading three of the four Suffering Servant songs in Isaiah. We read the other Servant song on Saturday for the sermon last night. We will have shorter devotions this week so that you can spend more time contemplating the messages of Isaiah as they relate to the Son of God who was crucified for yours and my sin.

What does it mean that this servant will not break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning wick? The way that the world knows how to bring peace is through war. It takes more killing to end killing. That's the way the world works. Peace comes through violence. But that is not how this servant will work. While Isaiah says he won't break a bruised reed or extinguish a dim candle, we might say he wouldn't hurt a fly. Through non-violence, this servant is going to bring peace and justice to the world.

Thank you God, for sending your Son to bring true peace to the world.

Tuesday, April 12 - Isaiah 49:1-7

This passage is presented as the words of the Suffering Servant. The servant proclaims a message from God in verse 6 that God has given the servant to the world as a light to the nations, for salvation to go to the ends of the earth. This is the message that Simeon shares about the baby Jesus in Luke 2:32. This is the message about the Messiah that John shares in the wilderness in Luke 3:6. Jesus came to be a light to the nations, to save all people, Jew and Greek. All people, kings and peasants, rich and poor, men, women, and children, should humble themselves in front of the Servant who has brought salvation to the world!

Wednesday, April 13 - Hebrews 12:1-3

“Looking to Jesus.” Those words popped out at me while reading this passage. Many times when we read this passage, we immediately think about the cloud of witnesses, those heroes of the faith who have gone before us. But they aren’t the main point. They are the crowd, the previous relay runners who are cheering us on. What keeps us going? What motivates us to persevere in the race? Looking to Jesus.

Physically speaking, it’s hard to look to someone if you have your head down. When your head is down all you see is the ground. Our footsteps are not what we are to watch during this race, but we are to look *up* to Jesus. And when you think about looking up, it makes looking to Jesus even more impactful. Jesus was hoisted *up* on a cross, elevating for all of the world to see. Jesus choose to disregard its shame and endured this torture.

When you struggle to keep going in your Christian walk, when sin is clinging closely, look up to Jesus. Look upon him as he agonized on the cross. He showed us a way to endure hostility, so do not lose heart. Keeping looking to Jesus.

Thursday, April 14 - John 13:1-17

Today is Maundy Thursday. Maundy is Latin for “mandate or command.” Throughout the centuries it became the word used for washing the feet of the poor like Jesus washes the feet of the disciples in our passage for today. More than likely, John 13:34-35 played a role in the naming of Maundy Thursday as well when Jesus gives the command to his disciples to “Love one another.”

The washing of the disciples’ feet is such a symbolic moment in the life and ministry of Jesus. I think it perfectly represents who Jesus was. He gave up his place in heaven to become a servant of men. No work was below him and he did the work that no one else wanted to do.

Jesus concludes the washing of the feet with a statement I’d like to repeat here: “servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” We are servants and messengers for our Lord. If he was willing to do the work no one else wanted to do, what should we be willing to do?

Friday, April 15 - Isaiah 52:13-53:12

“By his bruises, we are healed.” Jesus did not have to die. Jesus chose to die so that we may live. Jesus chose to be the sacrifice for the sin of the world. His sacrifice has made us whole. Thank you Lord for giving us life.

Spend today in thanks to the Lord for the sacrifice he made for you.

Saturday, April 16 - Matthew 27:57-66

The world always thinks it can fight against the power of God. What are a couple of guards and a stone going to do against a God who can fit a camel through the eye of a needle? Not much.

Sunday, April 17 - John 20:1-18

Happy Easter! HE IS RISEN!!!