

REFLECT

Take up your cross and follow Me.

THE
2019 *Lenten Study*

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Thank you for participating in our six-week 2019 Lenten study, whether you are joining in small group discussion, participating in a Sunday morning class, reviewing these questions for your individual study, or engaging in some combination of the three. These six sessions, which follow the Sunday sermons preached during Lent on the theme *Reflect: If Any Want to Become My Followers...*, can be part of your Lenten spiritual growth. Before you begin, please take a moment to read these guidelines and explanations that may help along the way.

About the Sermon and Study Topics

These studies flow with the sermon series. First we will hear a sermon on Sunday, and then we will meet as groups (or study as individuals) to learn more from a biblical perspective. In other words, the studies come after the sermon is preached, and not before. The information below may help you follow this process:

Sermon	Scripture	Group Meeting
March 10	(Mark 8:31-38)	Week of March 10-16
March 17	(Exodus 20:1-17) (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)	Week of March 17-23
March 24	(Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-21)	Week of March 24-30
March 31	(Hebrews 5:5-10)	Week of March 31-April 6
April 7	(1 Peter 2:1-10)	Week of April 7-13
April 14	(John 12:12-16)	Week of April 14-20

The reason for this process is two-fold. First, it connects us with the sermons, providing a synergy between our study and our proclaiming God's Word. Second, it allows us to wrestle in helpful ways with the thoughts and implications the sermons provoke.

About the Discussion Questions

When we study Scripture, we do not immediately jump to "what this verse means to me." Instead, responsible and useful Bible study moves with an intentional flow, so we consider the context, setting, and meaning of the Bible passages before we start thinking about how the Scriptures impact our lives.

The questions are written with this flow in mind. The flow can be summarized with an acronym: “IDEA.”

I **Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passages** • Every study is introduced with at least one opening question or icebreaker, just to prime the pump for your thought and discussion.

D **Discovering: What the Passages Say** • Here we talk about the basic stuff of the passages. Often we are answering the “Who? What? When? Where? How?” questions so we understand what the passages are saying and, sometimes, what they are not saying.

E **Exploring: What the Passages Mean** • Now we move to the work of interpretation. Now we begin to go beyond the surface level to the meaning and significance of the biblical texts. We look at bigger questions, at contexts, and at other issues.

A **Applying: Wrestling with the Implications for Our Lives** • Once we know what the passages are saying and meaning, we move to the “So what?” questions. Now that we know this, what do we do? What are the logical and necessary implications for our lives if the biblical passages are true and on the mark?

You’ll find this flow helpful as it moves you through the process either as a small group, a Sunday morning class, with a friend over coffee, or in your individual devotions.

Also, you’ll notice the questions in each study are not numbered. Instead they are “bulleted.” Thus you are free to take questions in a different order, to skip questions as needed, and to add questions on your own. The purpose of the Lenten studies in the first place is not so you can slog through a list of questions and thus complete an assignment, but so you can engage in meaningful study and conversation about how the Scriptures and topics that matter intersect.

About the Two Bible Translations

Two different translations of each passage will be provided for our consideration.

The English Standard Version, on one hand, is an “essentially literal” translation, seeking as much as possible to render the original Hebrew and Greek in a word-for-word fashion and yet understandable in English.

The New Living Translation, on the other hand, is a “dynamic equivalence” translation, seeking to find equivalent words, phrases, and expressions that connect with today’s English speakers but may not be literal renderings of the original manuscripts.

Comparing two diverse translations can be very helpful as we study, discuss, and reflect on Scripture.

A Final Word

Much appreciation is due to Martha Moore, Jeanmarie Tade, and Laurien Hook for their contributions to this study with lessons and feedback, as well as to MDPC Communications and its director, Ginny Glass, for its excellent and beautiful work in preparing this guide.

I believe God will richly bless your life during this Lenten season as you study, discuss, and reflect upon the theme of following Christ as His disciple. Grace and peace to you as you do so.



The Rev. Dr. Clay J. Brown
Associate Pastor, Equipping Ministries

REFLECT

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Setting the Stage

Talking about Christian discipleship often leads to a major misunderstanding. We end up thinking it's all up to us! But we could not be more mistaken. We do not start and nurture a relationship with God through what we bring to the table. Instead, we start and nurture a relationship with God solely by God's initiative, by "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone," in the words of the Protestant Reformers. So when we talk about discipleship, we are emphatically NOT stating we must work our way to God.

At the same time, "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" naturally leads to lives expressed in thankfulness and commitment to God. In other words, "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" results in our serving as Christ's disciples above all other commitments and allegiances we hold. We struggle and fall along the way. But disciples of Jesus we remain.

To launch our 2019 Lenten study, first we will explore and discuss one of the most famous teachings from Jesus about discipleship: we deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him.

Wow! What on earth is Jesus really saying here? What are the implications of this staggering statement by our Lord and Savior? Let's find out.

Scripture

Mark 8:31-38

English Standard Version

³¹ And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³ But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." ³⁴ And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples, He said to them, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed

of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

New Living Translation

³¹ Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later He would rise from the dead. ³² As He talked about this openly with His disciples, Peter took Him aside and began to reprimand Him for saying such things. ³³ Jesus turned around and looked at His disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" He said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." ³⁴ Then, calling the crowd to join His disciples, He said, "If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. ³⁶ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? ³⁷ Is anything worth more than your soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of Me and My message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when He returns in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Discussion Questions

Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- (Especially if you are in a new group) What is your name? Tell us something that will help us remember you vividly!
- It is hard to go through modern life without experiencing a sales pitch. In your opinion, what makes a sales pitch effective? What makes a sales pitch ineffective? Please share in summary form one of the best sales pitches you've ever heard and your response to it.

Discovering: What the Passage Says

- Compare the two translations above for Mark 8:31-38. What jumps out at you as you read them? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- Please read Mark 8:27-30. What has occurred in this passage to set up Mark 8:31-38?
- How does Jesus begin His teaching in verse 31? How does it differ from the "sales pitch" the disciples may have expected? In substance? In tone?
- In verse 32, Peter responds to Jesus. What assertive verbs are used in the passage to describe Peter's demeanor and attitude?
- Jesus replies to Peter in verse 33. What verb is used to describe this conversation? Why might this verb be important to note?
- After Jesus speaks with Peter, He calls the crowd in with His disciples in verse 34. How does He start off His teaching to the larger group in this same verse?
- Jesus describes an exchange of sorts in verses 35-37. What is it?
- What is the result in verse 38 for someone coming out on the wrong end of the exchange in verses 35-37? To what future event does this refer?

Exploring: What the Passage Means

- According to first-century popular opinion, who is the Christ and what is He supposed to do? According to today's popular opinion? How does Jesus' teaching about Himself both demolish and expand upon this popular opinion?
- Why is Peter so upset with Jesus? Does the fact our passage is the first time in Mark's Gospel that Jesus overtly mentions the trajectory of His life explain (at least in part) Peter's response? Why or why not? What else might be going on to create such a response?
- Jesus, as the saying goes, "doubles down" in His reply to Peter. Is Jesus saying Peter is demon-possessed? If Jesus isn't speaking literally here, then what is Jesus stating about Peter? Is Peter alone in this flaw Jesus addresses, or is it shared in numerous ways through the centuries? If shared, how is it made known today?
- What does "deny yourself" (or "give up your own way"), "take up your cross," and "follow Me" each mean? How are each of these often misunderstood or mischaracterized? Please take a shot at paraphrasing each of these into less "churchy" language to make them more understandable.
- What does "deny yourself" (or "give up your own way"), "take up your cross," and "follow Me" mean when you put all three of them together? What is a good summation of their collective witness and wisdom? Why do you think the Christian faith has given such emphasis to this collective witness and wisdom for centuries? What does this collective witness and wisdom say to us now?
- Unpack how verse 35 elaborates upon what Jesus says in verse 34. How does Jesus amplify and emphasize His earlier teaching here?
- Today, how do we see people attempt to gain the "whole world" and, in so doing, lose what is most important? Why is this attempt so popular or common? What makes it so easy for humans to fall under this temptation's spell?
- What is Jesus saying as He ends His teaching in verse 38? How may a person be ashamed of Jesus and His gospel? What are the long-term ramifications?

Applying: Wrestling with the Implications for Our Lives

- One implication of this passage is Jesus' suffering and crucifixion are central to the Christian faith; our lives, if we follow Him, will reflect this same path. Truth be told, this implication bothers us. Suffering is never on our personal "to do" lists. Furthermore, suffering is considered by some as a sign we are not in God's will. So why is suffering so important to our spiritual development? How can we embrace it and grow through it?
- Another implication is we are called to follow Jesus as He really is, not Jesus as we want Him to be. How have we created (and keep creating) a Jesus who mirrors ourselves (our culture, our politics, our wants, and so on) instead of the Jesus revealed in the Scriptures? Discuss some specific ways we may help one another, both one-on-one and in small groups, to follow the real Jesus.
- Still another implication is every Christian is called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Discipleship isn't an optional part only for the chosen few, but it's for all who trust in Jesus, denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, and following Him. So how does discipleship play out in daily life? How do we put this to work on the job? At home with our families? In our relationships with our spouses or

other loved ones? With our next-door neighbors? Share with one another some concrete things we can do as disciples to make this calling a daily reality.

- One final implication is Jesus speaks quite clearly about the fallacy of living by the world's pattern. So why does this pattern remain so attractive to us who claim to follow Jesus? Often one can't tell the Christians from the non-Christians, and often the non-Christians are far better! What changes do we need to make so we may witness more winsomely to God's love through Christ? What idols do we need to forsake? How does God's grace make a difference?

REFLECT

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Setting the Stage

When we were children, adults often asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. Answers varied from astronaut to artist to super hero to veterinarian and everything in between. Interestingly, many of us can trace our current professions to some sort of childhood play we loved best and engaged in often when we were younger.

Did any of us ever say we wanted to be one of Jesus' disciples? Arguably being a Jesus follower has been the most important and life changing vocation we have pursued. And yet, compared to our professional vocations, most of our training to become a disciple has been much less formal.

The word "vocation" comes from Latin "vocare," which means "to call." So vocation, from the Christian perspective, is God calling His followers to partner with Him in the work He is doing.

How has God been inviting you to partner with Him lately? Have you heard His call? Listen through the following Scripture passages and the discussions shared by your covenant community for God's voice to you this week. Trust that He is speaking to you and wants you to hear His voice through His written word, through this community of friends, through your prayers.

Scripture

Exodus 20:1-17

English Standard Version

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying, ² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments. ⁷ You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. ⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your

livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹² Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹³ You shall not murder. ¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ You shall not steal. ¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

New Living Translation

¹ Then God gave the people all these instructions: ² "I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. ³ You must not have any other god but Me. ⁴ You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. ⁵ You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me. ⁶ But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love Me and obey My commands. ⁷ You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse His name. ⁸ Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. ¹² Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you. ¹³ You must not murder. ¹⁴ You must not commit adultery. ¹⁵ You must not steal. ¹⁶ "ou must not testify falsely against your neighbor. ¹⁷ You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."

English Standard Version

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

New Living Translation

¹⁸ The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. ¹⁹ As the Scriptures say, "I will

destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.”²⁰ So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.²¹ Since God in His wisdom saw to it that the world would never know Him through human wisdom, He has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.²² It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.²³ So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense.²⁴ But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God’s weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

Discussion Questions

Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passages

- Share a brief but amusing story of a time you broke one of the Ten Commandments as a child. What were the circumstances? What were the repercussions? How did you make amends?
- What are the wisest and the most foolish pieces of advice you’ve ever received?

Discovering: What the Passages Say

- Read aloud and compare the two translations above. What jumps out as you read them? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- Briefly describe how it came to be that God’s people were living in Egypt and how they had become slaves. How did God rescue them? (See Exodus 6-14 to be reminded.)
- Read Exodus 19:1-7. What does God tell Moses will happen if the Israelites fully keep God’s covenant? What is their response?
- Read Exodus 19:10-14. How are the people to prepare themselves for the receiving of the Ten Commandments? What were some of the ways that even Creation itself prepared for this event?
- The Ten Commandments can be divided neatly into two groups. Who is the focus of the first four? Who is the focus of the second six? What five or six things come to mind that are significant about these commandments? What is noteworthy that the first four commandments address idolatry?
- Paul wrote letters to the church in Corinth because it was experiencing quarrels and divisions about various issues. Using 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, what does Paul suggest is a possible source of these arguments?
- What does Paul say about the foolishness of the cross? Why is the cross foolishness to Gentiles? How is it a stumbling block for the Jews?

Exploring: What the Passages Mean

- Share what you know about various covenants found in the Bible. How has God already revealed He is a worthy covenant partner?
- Exodus 19 informs us God was creating a new relationship with the Israelites. How do the commandments guide, prepare, and shape them to become a king-

dom of priests and a holy nation? What is God’s purpose for His people in this endeavor? How would these efforts make them His treasured possession?

- What would be three or four reasons for having rules and responsibilities for the Israelites to follow in order to have this covenant relationship with God?
- Even though the commandments are written as “you shall not,” how can they be seen in a positive light?
- In what ways would preaching Christ crucified appear foolish? In the world’s wisdom, what would be a better way to preach Christ?
- Last week we saw Peter struggle when Jesus told the disciples He would have to suffer and die. What are ways Jesus’ crucifixion has been a difficult concept to accept, for both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles)? Today, what are ways people use the crucifixion as a reason for not following Jesus?
- How is Christ both the power of God and the wisdom of God? What makes Christ crucified both wise and powerful?

Applying: Wrestling with the Implications for Our Lives

- Please read aloud the following Scripture passages: Isaiah 49:6-7; Isaiah 60:1-3; Luke 2:32; Matthew 5:14-16; Acts 13:47; Acts 26:23; 1 Peter 2:4-9; Revelation 5:9-10; Revelation 21:22-27. What are 2-3 reoccurring themes, repeated phrases, similar ideas addressed in all these passages?
- Starting with the Old Testament passages, what is the progression of how the light came into the world?

OT _____

NT _____

Us _____

- God has always been at work and has always called us to partner with Him in His Kingdom work. Who comes to mind as the OT characters who partnered with God? Who are NT characters? How do their stories inform us today in our discipleship journey? What are the implications of both their failures and success in our stories of discipleship today?
- N. T. Wright comments in his book, *The Day the Revolution Began*, “Mission...is the Spirit-driven, cross-shaped work of Jesus’ followers as they worship the true God and, confronting idols with the news of Jesus’ victory, work for the signs of his kingdom in human lives and institutions.” How do these truths change the way you think of discipleship? What are 1 or 2 ways you sense God’s call in your life? What are your first steps?

REFLECT

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Setting the Stage

Historically, God's people have often struggled to follow Him with integrity, conviction, and focus. It's the way things are.

From Adam and Eve, to Noah, to Abraham and Sarah, to Jacob and most of his sons, we see the chosen people regularly reject this call upon their lives and decide to go in any direction other than the one God intends. And this list of people is just from Genesis. Both Old and New Testament narratives describe in abundant detail how faithless His people sometimes may be.

Therefore, God's judgment upon sin and evil is seen not only upon the world at large, but also upon His called-out people. Judgment is necessary because sin and evil must be accounted for and not sloughed off. Yet, at the same time, God's love and mercy are profoundly present to redeem, to renew, and to restore all who will trust and follow Him. The Good News is Jesus provides the way to God, meeting the requirements of both judgment and mercy, and His disciples follow Him in the intersection of this divine judgment and mercy all their lives.

This week's study considers two passages of Scripture. The first is an incredible, but not well-known, story from the Old Testament book of Numbers about the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land. The second is the setting for perhaps the most popular Bible verse in the world, John 3:16. Believe it or not, both passages are strongly connected by none other than the teaching of Jesus Himself.

How do the teachings of these two passages assist us in putting into practice the call of Jesus to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses, and to follow Him alone? Let's see.

Scriptures

Numbers 21:4-9

English Standard Version

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." ⁶ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have

spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

New Living Translation

⁴ Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, ⁵ and they began to speak against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" they complained. "There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!" ⁶ So the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. ⁷ Then the people came to Moses and cried out, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ Then the LORD told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!" ⁹ So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!

English Standard Version

John 3:14-21

¹⁴ "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because He has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

New Living Translation

¹⁴ "And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life. ¹⁶ For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him. ¹⁸ There is no judgment against anyone who believes in Him. But anyone who does not believe in Him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

Discussion Questions

Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- Share a blessing you have experienced since you last met as a group.
- A transgenerational, transcultural human trait is the willingness to complain about our circumstances even when things are going well. How do we see this in today's world? How does social media reflect this trait? What about the human condition makes this trait so common?

Discovering: What the Passage Says

- Compare the two translations above for Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:14-21. What jumps out at you as you read them? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- What is going on in Numbers 21:4-5 with the Israelites? How does God respond to the Israelites in Numbers 21:6?
- The Israelites turn to Moses in Numbers 21:7. What do they acknowledge in their request? For what do they ask?
- The Lord gives instructions for Moses to provide a means of relief in Numbers 21:8-9. What is this process and how is it applied to the needs of the people?
- As Jesus talks to Nicodemus in John 3:14-15, what event does He pull out of the Old Testament and apply to Himself? How does He connect it with His mission in the world?
- What, according to John 3:16, is John's commentary [see **NOTE** on opposite page] on Jesus' comparison of Himself with the serpent in the wilderness? How does John link his commentary with the bronze serpent in the wilderness?
- In John 3:17, what purpose or motivation does the apostle state for God giving His Son? Why may the purpose or motivation be important?
- In John 3:18-21, the apostle lays out a terrifying alternative to John 3:16-17. What is this alternative? What key words are repeated several times? How does this alternative reflect the unfortunate reality of the human condition?

Exploring: What the Passage Means

- The Israelites' expressions of ingratitude, faithlessness, and blasphemy in Numbers 21 are not, by any stretch, their first response in this fashion during the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Briefly review the account of the Exodus in the Old Testament to find other instances. Why do you think their trust in God's providential care is so fickle? Are they alone in their fickleness?
- Why doesn't God simply ignore the Israelite complaints this time instead of issuing such a definitive and clear correction? In your opinion, what makes this particular incident worthy of a significant response by God when He doesn't respond with judgment every time?
- Read 2 Kings 18:1-4. What problem does the bronze serpent cause many years after the event? How and why is this so typical of humans?
- As Jesus describes Himself being "lifted up" in the same manner as the bronze serpent in Numbers 21, do you think He's speaking merely in terms of physical elevation? What other meanings of "lifted up" might apply to what happens on the Cross?
- John 3:16 appears to be an explanation of John 3:14-15. How does the most famous verse in the New Testament use the connection of Jesus with the bronze serpent to share

strong theological truths about Jesus' person and work? What are some of these strong truths?

- A close reading of Numbers 21:4-9 infers strongly not all the Israelites gazed upon the raised-up bronze serpent, and thus those who didn't look upon the serpent received the judgment coming to them. Do you see any connection between this judgment and the judgment described in John 3:18-21? If so, what?
- Think back to John 8:31-38 (the passage with which we began our Lenten study) and Jesus' call to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus if anyone would be His disciple. How might the "lifted up" of Jesus mentioned in John 3 intersect with this call? What does this intersection between Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:14-21 say about what it means to follow Jesus?

Applying: Wrestling with the Implications for Our Lives

- One implication of this passage is many times people called by God to follow His way often reject God's way in favor of their own way, even if the consequences are horrific. How may we assist each other to keep in the middle of God's way for our lives? How may we help a friend see when he/she is moving away from God rather than toward Him, without being judgmental or harsh?
- Another implication is the Cross provides the means for us to follow Christ as Lord, and without Jesus being "lifted up," we have no hope. Yet many today, both those who call themselves non-Christian and those who call themselves Christian, find the Cross to be primitive, offensive, and barbaric. How may we answer such concerns and witness to the wonder of the Cross with our neighbors?
- Still another implication is Christian disciples commit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior because of God's incredible love for us, as John 3:16, the New Testament's most well-known verse, says. We love God and others because we have been loved first, not because we are really good people who've earned God's love. How will this central reason for following Christ change how we treat others? How we forgive others? How we sacrifice on behalf of others?
- One final implication is God's judgment and God's mercy are two sides of the same coin, and we need them both for a fully orbed understanding of God's character and nature. Yet God's judgment upon sin and evil is looked upon by many as a leftover from ancient days, for God is love. How may we help our neighbors understand a God with no judgment is ultimately a God not worth worshiping and serving because He winks at evil? What stories, examples, and truths have helped you in this regard? What can we share with others?

NOTE: Many (perhaps most) scholars and commentators across the Christian spectrum believe John, not Jesus, is probably speaking in John 3:16-21. The reasons include word choice, verb tenses, and more. But this doesn't change the inspiration or significance of this famous text. R. C. Sproul's comments are one example of this scholarly consensus as he explains in his *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary* on John: "Verse 16 of John 3 is surely the best-known verse in the New Testament. Many Bible versions put this in red to indicate that these words were spoken by Jesus. In my opinion, this verse should not be in red... It's difficult to tell where in this chapter Jesus' words end and John's editorial comments begin, but most commentators see John 3:16 as written by John, and I agree with that assessment. However, even if this is John speaking and not Jesus, this verse is not any less the Word of God or any less true, for John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

REFLECT

Take up your cross and follow Me.



Setting the Stage

Discipline. Obedience. Reverence. Suffering. Let's be frank: these are not our favorite words! And they sound like work. But we know—especially those of us studying Romans this academic year—it is by God's mercy and grace that we have been saved. We bring nothing to the cross. God did all the work for us in Christ. We respond in gratitude to Him and follow Jesus.

Jesus is our role model for discipline, obedience, reverence towards God, and enduring suffering. Just as He learned from the Father, we learn from Him. In Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV), Jesus invites us, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." To become a disciple of Christ we must learn from Him.

Today we will look at Jesus, His divinity and humanity, as well as a mysterious character: Melchizedek. Who is he? What does he represent? What can we learn from them?

Scripture

Hebrews 5:5-10

English Standard Version

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by Him who said to Him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten You"; ⁶ as He says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." ⁷ In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. ⁸ Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

New Living Translation

⁵ That is why Christ did not honor Himself by assuming He could become High Priest. No, He was chosen by God, who said to Him, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father." ⁶ And in another passage God said to Him, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." ⁷ While Jesus was here on earth, He offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the One who could rescue Him from death. And God

Heard His prayers because of His deep reverence for God. ⁸ Even though Jesus was God's Son, He learned obedience from the things He suffered. ⁹ In this way, God qualified Him as a perfect High Priest, and He became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey Him. ¹⁰ And God designated Him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Discussion Questions

Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- This is the fourth week of the Lenten study. You may have someone new in your group. If so, introduce each other again. Say a brief word about your week.
- What is your emotional reaction to the words "obey" and "obedience"? Do they make you feel warm and fuzzy? Share examples of obedience and disobedience from the Bible or from your life.
- Briefly share what, if anything, you know about Melchizedek.

Discovering: What the Passage Says

- Read aloud and compare the two translations above for Hebrews 5:5-10. What stands out to you as you read them? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- Read aloud Hebrew 4:14-5:1-4. How does this passage give background for Hebrews 5:5-10?
- Who chose Christ to be High Priest in verse 5b? How does Jesus show humility in verse 5a? What does God say to Him in verse 5c?
- In verse 6, Melchizedek is introduced with a reference to Psalm 110:4. Melchizedek is mentioned in 18 verses in the Bible in Genesis (4 verses), the Psalms (1 verse), and Hebrews (13 verses). Please read aloud Hebrews 7. How is Jesus like Melchizedek? Different from Melchizedek?
- Notice the intensity of Jesus' prayers, pleadings, and supplications in verse 7: "with a loud cry and tears" (NLT) or "loud cries and tears" (ESV). To whom does Jesus pray and why? Why was Jesus heard? Define "reverence."
- How did Jesus learn obedience (verse 8)? Why do you think Jesus was not "exempt" from suffering even though He was God's Son? What are examples of Jesus' suffering?
- In verse 9, how did God "qualify" Jesus as a "perfect High Priest" (NLT)? What did Jesus become? For whom did Jesus become this?
- Looking at verse 10 and recalling Hebrews chapter 7, what is the significance of Jesus being "a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (ESV)? Who designated Jesus to this high priesthood?

Exploring: What the Passage Means

- Melchizedek is a mysterious person in the Bible. In Genesis 14:18-20, he is introduced as a historical figure whose priesthood was accepted by Abraham. Melchizedek brings bread and wine, and Abraham tithes to him. One purpose of this passage is to show both Jesus had a divine appointment to priesthood (different from and superior to Aaron and the Levitical priesthood) and Jesus' priest-

hood would last forever. Jesus is the new High Priest, not according to the order of Aaron (a human line), but after the order of Melchizedek (divine), with no further need to offer sacrifices because He did this “once for all when He offered up Himself” (Hebrews 7:27 ESV) on the cross for our sins. Having read the Genesis passage and Hebrews chapter 7, what are your thoughts now about Melchizedek?

- In verse 5, Christ is “appointed” (ESV) or “called” (NLT) by God to be a high priest. In verse 10, Jesus is “designated” by God to be a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. This is the only place in the Bible that the Greek word for “designated,” *prosagoreutheis*, is used. What significance could this one-time usage have? Is there a difference between an appointment and a designation? [Spoiler alert: Many commentators link “designated” to verse 9 and the eternal salvation Christ offers to all who obey Him, distinguishing Christ from Melchizedek.]
- The Greek word for obedience used in Hebrews 5, *hypakoen*, is used eight times in the New Testament. Consider its use in Romans 6:16 (ESV): “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” and in 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV): “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...” How does the use of the same word in these passages lead to a greater understanding of the Hebrews 5 passage?
- Jesus offered powerful prayers as shown in verse 7. Two words in Greek were used: *deesis*, the general New Testament word for prayers, and *hiketeria*, a word with a stronger element of entreaty in it. This emphasis comes from the ancient practice of holding out an olive branch as a sign of appeal. *Hiketeria* is translated “pleadings” in the NLT and “supplications” in the ESV. In both translations, these two kinds of prayers are followed by a reference to cries and tears. What do these kinds of prayers teach us about Christ’s relationship with God? What do they teach us about prayer? [NOTE: For further study, see Richard Foster’s book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, especially chapter 4, “The Prayer of Tears,” and chapter 5, “The Prayer of Relinquishment.”]

Applying: Wrestling with the Implications for Our Lives

- **Humility** – Verse 5 (ESV) says that “Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest...” How is this in alignment with other verses about humility, such as 1 Peter 5:6: “Humble yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that in the proper time He may exalt you...”? What does the principle of humility modeled by Jesus look like in your life – at home? In the workplace? At church?
- **Suffering** – We discussed suffering in Week One. An implication of this Hebrews passage is Jesus’ suffering was central to His life, and it was how He learned obedience to God (verse 8). Paul in Romans 5:3b-5 (ESV) identifies some of the fruit of suffering: “...suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” How have you experienced this truth in your life or seen it in the life of another? How do you balance a natural reluctance to embrace suffering with the knowledge that suffering is important to our spiritual development? What are ways to “lean in” to suffering when it comes, and grow through it?

- **Prayer** – Jesus prays with “loud cries and tears” (ESV) in verse 7. How is Jesus a model to us for prayer? We are Presbyterians, part of the body of believers often referred to as the “frozen chosen.” We like order and predictability. Jesus does not always pray with loud cries and tears, but here He does. Have you ever prayed with loud cries and tears? Are you comfortable with the idea of intense prayer? Why or why not?
- **Being Heard by God** – Verse 7b tells us that God heard Jesus’ prayer because He had a “deep reverence” (NLT) for God. How can we cultivate a deep reverence for God? What does that look like in daily life?
- **Obedience** – Another implication is following Jesus requires obedience. Jesus obeys and learns from the Father; we learn from Jesus. What are ways we can learn from Jesus? What has worked for you? What are you doing now? What do you plan to do next?
- **Discipleship** – As discussed in Week One (Mark 8:31-38), every Christian is called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. How Christ’s example of obedience, reverence, and suffering in the Hebrews 5 passage add to the principles in the Mark 8 passage of denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, and following Him? What do these principles, taught and modeled by Jesus, look like in your life – at home? With your neighbors? In the workplace? At church? Share with one another specific ways you have found or will try to make this calling to be a disciple a daily reality.

REFLECT

Take up your cross and follow Me.

WEEK
Five

Setting the Stage

Anyone who hears the Christian teaching *we are chosen by God through His grace by faith*, and then responds with, “Well, of course! Who wouldn’t choose me?” seriously misunderstands both why one is chosen and for what purpose.

This teaching, often called “election” in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, can be caricatured as a form of spiritual pride and self-aggrandizement. We’re better than others, and thus we have been chosen. We lord it over others because we have something they don’t.

Yet, in reality, God’s choosing of humans is never because they deserve it. God chooses the most unlikely people, while those we think should have been first on the list never hear the call for reasons known only to Him. David, for instance, was chosen to be king of Israel even though he was the youngest and scrawniest of all his siblings and was brought in from tending sheep as an afterthought.

Also, God’s choosing of humans is not simply for salvation, or as one wag once put it, “God’s fire insurance for eternity.” Instead, when God calls people into His family, He also has ministry in mind for them to accomplish in His name, as well. As Presbyterians often express it, we are “saved both for salvation and for service.”

This study takes one of the most powerful statements in the New Testament about our call as disciples, 1 Peter 2:1-10, and focuses on how our calling to be Christians is a calling to be disciples who love, serve, and minister in Jesus’ name. Let’s investigate how election and discipleship are connected.

Scripture

1 Peter 2:1-10

English Standard Version

¹ So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴ As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and

whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

New Living Translation

¹ So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. ² Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, ³ now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness. ⁴ You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple. He was rejected by people, but He was chosen by God for great honor. ⁵ And you are living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple. What’s more, you are His holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. ⁶ As the Scriptures say, “I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in Him will never be disgraced.” ⁷ Yes, you who trust Him recognize the honor God has given Him. But for those who reject Him, “The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.” ⁸ And, “He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. ⁹ But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light. ¹⁰ “Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God’s people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God’s mercy.”

Discussion Questions

Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- How is your week going? Share with each other one thing, good or bad, that happened since you last met.
- Have you ever been chosen for something positive you never thought you’d receive? How did this selection surprise you? Describe how it made an impact on you.

Discovering: What the Passage Says

- Compare the two translations above for 1 Peter 2:1-10. What jumps out at you as you read them? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- 1 Peter 2:1 lists some ethical imperatives for those who claim to follow Jesus. What are they and why might they be important here?
- What analogy is Peter making in 1 Peter 2:2-3? Please describe it.
- Peter expands upon this analogy in 1 Peter 2:4-8 for both Christians and Christ.

What are Christians called? How is Christ described? If you have a reference Bible, where are the three quotations from the Old Testament?

- What does 1 Peter 2:8 describe as the chief difficulty for those who are unaccepting of Jesus?
- 1 Peter 2:9 details how the followers of Christ are different. Call out each phrase in the first half of verse 9. What gives each phrase its “punch”? What is the result of such grace shown to followers of Jesus by God and what opportunity for service do they have?
- 1 Peter 2:10 sums up the message of the passage in a familiar quotation from Hosea. What does this summary proclaim about the people of God?

Exploring: What the Passage Means

- Do we all start out in our faith journeys as “newborn babies”? If so, how? What does Peter say will be the source of nourishment for babes like us? How do we receive it?
- Jesus is the “living stone,” according to 1 Peter 2:4. What makes this image so helpful in understanding who Jesus is and what He is all about? How is it significant for us to be described as “living stones,” sharing (at least in part) in this description?
- Peter calls all followers of Jesus “holy priests.” What is the role of a priest? How might we act in this role with fellow followers of Jesus? With those presently outside the family of faith?
- One of the most theologically hefty terms for Jesus in Scripture is “cornerstone.” In a building, what function does a cornerstone have? What theological and spiritual weight does this descriptive term carry when used about Jesus? Why is it crucial to Christian discipleship for it to do so?
- What about Jesus makes it so people either accept Him or stumble over Him?
- When we become Christ followers, we are not just saved for the hereafter. Even more, we become part of what God is doing in His world with a specific role and task on our plates. How do the terms “chosen people,” “royal priests,” “holy nation,” and “God’s own possession” define and describe the ministry we have as Christ’s disciples?
- The “before” and “after” when it comes to knowing Christ is stark and revealing. Who were we before we were “called out of darkness into His wonderful light”? Who are we now? Does this new status make us better than our fellow humans? If not, what does this new status direct us to do?

Applying: Wrestling with the Implications for Our Lives

- One implication of this passage is we all need to mature and to grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually in our Christian discipleship. Yet many who profess faith in Christ as their Lord (to use historic Presbyterian terminology) seem to have no interest in spiritual growth in any sense. Without seeking to be judgmental, it often appears many perceive both the Christian faith in general and one’s active participation in a community of faith as items on a list to be checked off rather than life-transforming beliefs, events, and resources. Why is this? How we can encourage one another, even the ones not so excited about it right now, to a well-rounded Christian discipleship?

- Another implication is Jesus is the only foundation for a life with purpose, meaning, and connectedness to God. This echoes other statements by Jesus Himself, such as John 14:6 (NLT), “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.” Yet our world offers many, many other foundations for life advertised as being equally (or more) effective, and Jesus is understood by many humans as a way, but not The Way. How do we follow Jesus as His disciples in such ways that lift up His foundation for life and inspire our friends and neighbors to know more about Him?
- Still another implication is every Christian has a ministry as Jesus’ disciple. To what ministry are you called? How do you recognize the ministry to which Jesus calls you as one of His “royal priests”? Does it float down to you from heaven? Do you figure it out by some trial and error? Do friends and counselors provide helpful advice? Some or all of the above?
- One final implication is the amazing, transformational power of God’s grace through Jesus and the incredible difference His grace makes in a human life. Once you were not God’s person, but now through Jesus you belong to Him. Once you had not received God’s mercy, but now you have. Because of Jesus, everything is now different. How do you now treat others—friends and enemies—differently because of Jesus? How do you now spend your money and use your material resources differently because of Jesus? How do you now allocate your time and energy differently because of Jesus?

REFLECT

Take up your cross and follow Me.



Setting the Stage

We have spent the last several weeks looking into Christian discipleship and what it means for our lives here and now. One of the things that is often the most challenging for us as Christians is to think that our lives will look differently than Jesus'. Yes, you read that sentence correctly. Discipleship means that we are being transformed into the image of Jesus by drawing more closely to Him each day. However, we often like to draw near to a self-made image of Jesus rather than the Jesus revealed in the Scriptures.

Our passage today depicts the King of the Universe riding into a dusty town on a donkey. He does not arrive on a war horse in the same zealous manner as the conquering Caesars of His day. Rather, He fulfills a prophetic utterance about Himself from the book of Zechariah by coming into Jerusalem on a humble donkey. No fame. No glory. Headed to His death.

While it is an unpopular thought, we deceive ourselves as Christ followers when we think that our lives should somehow look differently than our donkey-riding, humble, cross-carrying Lord. If discipleship is about anything other than us taking on the form of Christ, who took on the form of a servant and was obedient even unto death (Philippians 2:1-11), then it has become more about our individual comforts and desires than about becoming more like Christ. While it is certainly true that we worship a resurrected, ascended, and glorified King, we must not fall into the temptation of believing that our life of discipleship will only look like the glorified portion of His life. Thankfully, we have a great promise that He will never leave us or forsake us even amidst any suffering we endure!

Scripture

John 12:12-16

English Standard Version

¹² The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, ¹⁵ "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" ¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him.

New Living Translation

¹² The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors ¹³ took palm branches and went down the road to meet Him. They shouted, "Praise God! Blessings on the One who comes in the name of the LORD! Hail to the King of Israel!" ¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: ¹⁵ "Don't be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey's colt." ¹⁶ His disciples didn't understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into His glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about Him.

Discussion Questions

Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- Share a one to two-sentence summary of what this Lenten study has revealed to you.
- How has your concept of discipleship shifted or grown in any new ways over the past six weeks?

Discovering: What the Passage Says

- Compare the two translations above for John 12:12-16. What jumps out at you as you read them? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- The story of the Triumphal Entry is one of the few stories that makes its way into each of the Gospel accounts. Read Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-10, and Luke 19:28-40. Then discuss the different and similar elements and messages conveyed by the four gospel writers' expressions of this story.
- In John 12:15, Jesus quotes a passage from Zechariah 9:9. How does knowing that the surrounding text of Zechariah 9:9 is about God's judgment and salvation of His people inform your reading of John 12:15?
- John 12:16 tells us His disciples did not understand everything unfolding in front of them as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. How does knowing even Jesus' immediate disciples "missed" things right in front of them encourage you as you try to follow Him?

Exploring: What the Passage Means

- If you think about it, you can surely remember seeing (either in-person or in a book) an image of a conquering hero, seated on a war horse, riding into town as they proclaim a victory. Why is it important Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" looks so different than those of the conquering heroes of His day? What does this tell us about the Christian life?
- The word "Hosanna" delivers the idea of "save" or "rescue". At the time of Jesus' life, the people of Israel were under Roman rule and authority. They had long-hoped for a Messiah who would arrive on a war horse and destroy their Roman oppressors. They shouted "Hosanna!" hoping that Jesus would be the one to overthrow Rome and establish God's Kingdom. How did Jesus' arrival on a donkey, going towards His death, upturn this understanding? How should it shape our view of Jesus today? What does this mean for us as His disciples?

- Going a little beyond our designated passage for the day, we are told in John 12:17-18 that a crowd had been following Jesus since He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:28-44). These people had seen His power and were attracted to Him because He had performed a powerful sign. Do we follow Jesus only because we know He has immense power and He might be able to do something for us, or because we have experienced His love and His life, death, and resurrection? What is an example of this belief or behavior in your life?
- To push our story out yet a little further, read John 12:19. How does the Pharisees' reaction make you feel? The Pharisees longed for the restoration and glorification of Israel. However, their people were now following a wild, unpredictable Rabbi. Do we ever look more like Pharisees in wanting a king who will do as we want? If so, how?
- How does knowing that Jesus is on His way to His death, rather than on His way to physically overthrow Rome and establish Himself as Caesar/King, inform how you interpret this as a "Triumphal Entry"?

Applying: Wrestling with the Implications for Our Lives

- To borrow a question from our very first week together: One implication of this passage is Jesus' suffering and crucifixion are central to the Christian faith; our lives, if we follow Him, will reflect this same path. Truth be told, this implication bothers us. Suffering is never on our personal "to do" lists. Furthermore, suffering is considered by some as a sign we are not in God's will. So why is suffering so important to our spiritual development? How can we embrace it and grow through it?
- One implication of this passage is that Jesus rarely appears or behaves as we want Him to in our lives. How does this understanding inform our discipleship? When have we made discipleship into something overly easy or something that is more us-centered than Jesus-centered?
- Where in life are you tempted to want Jesus to be *only* a conquering hero on a war horse rather than a humble servant riding a donkey? How can we pray for our focus and desires to be changed in this area?
- Where do you need to shout "Hosanna!" in your life right now? What needs to be saved or rescued? Be careful—Jesus rarely saves us in the ways we think He should, but we can trust in His ultimate care and love for us!

NOTES

NOTES

MDPC Equipping Ministries

Rev. Dr. Clay Brown

Associate Pastor

Martha Moore

Teacher-in-Residence

Laurien Hook

Ministry Coordinator



MDPC

Memorial Drive
Presbyterian Church

11612 Memorial Drive • Houston, Texas 77024
mdpc.org • 713-782-1710