

With Jesus

Sermons by Dr. Russell F. Metcalfe, Jr.

*Permission to reprint or publish Dr. Metcalfe's material is **granted**
provided that the reprinting or republishing is not-for-profit.*

Table of Contents

With Jesus on the Mountain	5
With Jesus in the Wilderness	11
I. AT THE BEGINNING OF LENT WE LOOK AT TWO BEGINNINGS	12
II. BOTH STORIES SAY TWO BASIC THINGS ABOUT TEMPTATION	14
III. TEMPTATION AND OUR PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING	15
With Jesus at the Well of Sychar	17
With Jesus into the Light	21
With Jesus at the Cemetery	27
EZEKIEL'S VISION	27
DRY BONES AND GOD'S WORD TODAY	28
With Jesus into Holy Week	33
I AM THE KING OF PEACE	34
I AM THE LAMB OF GOD	35
I AM HE THAT HAVE THE KEYS OF DEATH AND OF HELL	35
With Jesus into Resurrection Life	37
EASTER REALLY MEANS RESURRECTION	37
EASTER REALLY MEANS A LIVING SAVIOR	38
JESUS LIVES AS OUR HIGH PRIEST IN GOD'S PRESENCE	39
JESUS LIVES AS OUR OMNIPOTENT KING FOREVER	39
EASTER REALLY MEANS THE GIFT OF LIFE BY GOD'S GRACE	40

With Jesus on the Mountain

With Jesus Series 1 of 7

- **With Jesus on the Mountain**
- With Jesus in the Wilderness
- With Jesus at the Well of Sychar
- With Jesus into the Light
- With Jesus at the Cemetery
- With Jesus into Holy Week
- With Jesus into Resurrection Life

February 18, 1996 AM

Matthew 17:1-9

The Transfiguration "*This is my Son ...listen to him!*"

Mountains as Points of Reference

One Sunday afternoon, a long time ago, instead of taking the usual Nazarene nap, I took my four sons on a hike up Mount Beacon above the majestic Hudson River in Beacon, New York. We lived in Poughkeepsie where I was pastor at Vassar Road Church.

It was sultry and hot, and the thought of climbing in shady, cooler woods sounded like fun.

It was a twenty minute drive to a place where we could leave the wagon as far up the mountain as it could go. Then it was just over an hour's walk to the top where you could look up and down the river for miles.

On the way up the trail we heard the sound of a brook off to one side, and followed the sound and found a beautiful place where the water was falling through a U shaped place in a big rock into a shallow pool like a basin underneath it. It was hot, and the water was very cool.

The four boys stripped down to their shorts and into the water they went.

One of them would sit in the cleft in the rock and dam up the water it was that narrow until it spilled over his shoulders then he'd jump into the basin below with the wave gushing after him.

We stayed at that pool half an hour or less that hot Sunday afternoon and that was thirty years ago. I drove back to Vassar Road and preached and led the evening service. I haven't a clue as to what I preached it has been long forgotten. But every one of those four boys, now grown men with families of their own, remembers that day we climbed Mount Beacon. And somehow it has a good place in our family history. It was one of those defining moments that help give life direction.

We've all had those times, those defining moments, that we remember as we look back across the landscape of our lives to those mountains, literal or figurative, that show us where we've been, and to some extent, who we are and where we're going. Perhaps the day the story in our Gospel lesson began started out like just any other day for the disciples. But it was going to turn out to be a day they would never, ever forget.

Jesus called to Peter, James, and John. He often went apart to pray, and a prayer time was all they really were expecting. Up and up the mountain trail they went, until they reached the top. And there they stopped. Luke's Gospel says that Jesus began to pray, and he also tells us that the three disciples became very sleepy.

Peter, James and John were not expecting what came next. While they watched in awe something wonderful beyond description began to happen. The kindly face of the Galilean carpenter began to change in ways the evangelist has found difficult to describe. Later the three men tried to find words to express what they had seen: "Light streamed from his face, as bright as the sun. His clothes became whiter than white they shone with light."

These men knew Jesus well. They had been with him three years and had heard him speak, and heal, and raise the dead. They had even confessed their faith that He is

the Son of God, the Messiah. But they were NOT prepared for this display of dazzling glory. They knew Jesus. But they also realized they hardly knew him at all!

(Our doctrines are good/necessary; they try to explain the mysteries of faith: Jesus is very God and very man, the Son of God and the Son of Mary. The Father in heaven helps us to confess our faith with Peter, and say with conviction: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" But NOTHING is as convincing and satisfying and thoroughly frightening as a mountaintop glimpse of Christ's glory!)

Then, as they watched, the three disciples became aware that two other people were present, talking with Jesus in the cloud of light. In some mysterious and wonderful way, they knew that these two glorious figures were Moses and Elijah, the Lawgiver, and the greatest of Old Testament prophets.

Moses on a mountain long before this great giant of faith, the meekest man who ever lived, had talked with God face to face, and had received the Ten Commandments, the holy Law of God by which all mankind is supposed to live, but especially the people of God.

Elijah on another mountain years later, but still a long time before, this rugged prophet had prayed fire down from heaven, and had defeated the false prophets and brought God's people back to Him.

Here were the Law and the Prophets in conversation with the Living Gospel, the Good News of Salvation. Here was a vision of the Law fulfilled, and of Truth triumphant, the whole Plan of Salvation, the whole Word of God represented in one glorious conversation.

Luke tells us something of what Moses and Elijah were discussing with their glorious Lord that mountaintop day. They were talking about another mountain yet to be climbed. They were talking about the hill we call Calvary.

Peter, James and John may not have understood the full implication in the dazzling light of the moment, but they were dramatically seeing portrayed before their eyes

- Jesus as fulfilling the Law (Moses), completing the truth of Torah; and
- Jesus as Champion over evil (Elijah), making sinners right with God, completing the Plan of Salvation.

The disciples were uncomfortable. Don't ever think that when God is manifested in power it is a comfortable, easy time. This was gut wrenching, frightening to the limit! Peter began to 'prattle' a bit. "Lord, let's build succoth booths right here on top of the mountain! We'll build three one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for You!"

Then came a majestic, thundering, authoritative voice from heaven. The Father put things into perspective. He said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to HIM!"

The heart of faith is not Jesus AND Law, or Jesus AND Proclamation, or Jesus AND anything else.

The heart of faith is Jesus. That is the message this mountain top experience carried home to Peter James and John. Then it was over. Just like that.

As soon as they came down the mountain actually before they got to the bottom they were back at nitty gritty work. As far as we know they never had another Transfiguration type opportunity. (Oh, yes, John saw the glorified Savior during his exile on Patmos you can read about it in the first chapter of the Revelation.) But these men never forgot what they saw on that mountain that day.

They needed it in just a few weeks when their Master was taken from them and mocked and beaten and killed on a Cross. It looked like defeat. It looked like weakness. (But) They had been to the mountain. They had seen the glory. They could believe when the Resurrection came.

They needed it after Jesus ascended to heaven, and their own crosses became heavy, and they were tempted to wonder if it was worth it. But they had seen a glimpse of the glory. They knew that their Master was Lord of Moses and Elijah who are very much alive. They had been on the mountain. They could trust that God would not waste their sacrifice.

James was killed by the sword early in the first wave of persecution. Had the vision been wasted on him? I don't think so. Peter led the church in Jerusalem, and then Antioch and Ephesus and Rome. The vision sustained him, and he passed it on to Luke. John the Beloved outlived all the other apostles. As long as he lived the memory of that day of Transfiguration on a mountain in the north of Israel was a blessing and a hope.

We cannot live on mountain tops, or even live FOR that kind of experience. Don't forget, eight perfectly good apostles got word of this day second hand, just like you and I have.

What we can do is live in confession of faith in our Master. If truly the faith has been granted us to believe that Jesus is the Christ we can say with Peter, six days BEFORE this glory time, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!"

What we can do if we have that faith is affirm from our hearts, "Jesus is LORD!" We can ask Him if we can follow Him around day after day. We can listen to Him pray. We can ask Him if we can come along when he cares for people who hurt. That is what we can do. And sometime when we least expect it there will be those loving times those tender times when Jesus lets us know He's pleased with us. Not Transfigurations, maybe. But mountain experiences. Defining moments. Moments we never forget.

And who's to say Oh well

Let's pray

Hymn No.66 *Thou Art Worthy*

With Jesus in the Wilderness

With Jesus Series 2 of 7

- With Jesus on the Mountain
- **With Jesus in the Wilderness**
- With Jesus at the Well of Sychar
- With Jesus into the Light
- With Jesus at the Cemetery
- With Jesus into Holy Week
- With Jesus into Resurrection Life

February 25, 1996

Preface

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Six weeks from today is Easter Sunday. I would like to give you a verse to use during these weeks and days before Easter as we join together in seeking to draw nearer to God. (Let me read the first few words in Hebrews 12:)

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." (Hebrews 12: 1 -3)

I especially underscore those three words: "looking unto Jesus..." All through Lent let's make that the key to our Bible reading and prayer. I ask you to look to Jesus "in all his offices," as John Wesley would urge us. By that I mean remember that Jesus is always our Prophet, our Priest, and our King.

Jesus is our Prophet, who calls us to turn from any selfish ways and be right with God. Jesus is our Priest, who by the sacrifice of his life on Calvary forgives our sins, and brings us with Himself to God by his blood. Jesus is our King, who leads us in the way we should go— our Shepherd who loves us and cares for us— our Physician who heals us, makes us whole.

Will you try to do this? to remember all through the time between now and Easter to be "looking unto Jesus— our Prophet, our Priest, our King!"?? (With that introduction to Lent (as a six week journey) we look at today's lessons:)

I. AT THE BEGINNING OF LENT WE LOOK AT TWO BEGINNINGS

We look back to the Garden where it all started— and to the Desert where Christ's battle with evil began in earnest. The two "beginnings" are very much connected.

You remember the story of what happened in the Garden.

One writer called it "the Big Mistake made by the father and mother of us all before they had really gotten the hang of being human." In a Reader's Digest version:

God said, "Don't eat the fruit!"

They ate the fruit anyway. And the rest is history.

And so we have our first parents to thank, or to blame, for what we call "original sin," however it is that we have been tainted with it. We are all sons and daughters of an Adam and Eve who were tempted, and who gave in to their temptation. Every son and daughter ever since has had some version or other of a repeat of that loss of innocence. We know that story pretty well:

- God said it.
- We heard it.
- We thought about it.
- And we went ahead and did it anyway. Every son and daughter has sinned— except One.

But we also remember another story. This story took place in the desert.

The first Adam, and Eve, came into a Garden. When they failed in their test of obedience they were expelled, and the earth was cursed. The Second Adam, Jesus Christ, was tempted in a Wilderness.

Fresh from the baptism, from the glory of God the Father's wonderful words: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!," Jesus is brought into confrontation with raw evil. The ordeal in the desert lasted forty days.

That is one big reason why Christians have taken the forty days before Easter to unite in spirit with our Lord.

The temptations of both Adam and Eve, and Jesus were across the whole spectrum of human needs and desires. There was the level of physical hunger, which could be understood as the drives or appetites of our bodies. There was the level of emotional need and the desire for acceptance, the cravings of our souls. There was the highest level, of choosing, of deciding who will say what is right and wrong, the statement of what it ultimately means to be human.

Jesus was asked to prove he is God's Son by making stones into bread. He was asked to prove he trusted God's Word by throwing himself off the temple so angels will catch him. He was asked to compromise "just once" and avoid all the agony of the cross.

In every case, of course, Jesus refused to argue or reason with Satan. He had taken the role of Servant of his Father— and he used the written Word as his guide.

By his triumph over sin, both there in the desert, and then on the cross, Jesus gave us the right and privilege of getting in on a new race of human beings. (John 1:12 As many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to those who believe on His name.")

We all carry Adam's genes. we know what it is to fail. Every one of us has lost innocence before God. But if we will, we can be sons and daughters of this new Adam. We can be born of the Spirit. We can all carry Jesus' genes— and we can know what it is to overcome temptation.

II. BOTH STORIES SAY TWO BASIC THINGS ABOUT TEMPTATION

All temptations begin with a question of God's Word, of one kind or other.

"Has God really said THAT?" That's the first approach of the wily serpent. In the desert Satan's opener was "IF you are (really) the Son of God all weak and hungry and wretched like this..."

The first line of attack will be to blur the lines— to confuse the difference between right and wrong— to question the Word of God Himself. (God HAS spoken!)

Treasure the Word of God! Listen when God wants to speak— even by humble means. Be careful how you handle the Bible! It is a very human book, and has been translated by very human people. But somehow the same Spirit who inspired it— and inspired it in ways no liberal OR fundamentalist can prove or disprove by merely humanistic means— somehow the Spirit is able to preserve that message of salvation so we don't need to err if we will listen.

The serpent is still saying "Has God SAID?" Ask your heart! You KNOW God has said!

All temptation, ultimately, is temptation to try to take God's place.

The second aspect of temptation is to say— even if God HAS spoken, HE IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED! I WILL MAKE MY OWN DECISION ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG!

Adam and Eve fell for Satan's promise "You will be like gods to know right from wrong." Jesus, in His mission as God's Servant, remained totally obedient to the Father's will.

In Adam, Paul tells us, we all died. In Jesus— in his victory— we all (potentially) were made alive.

In Adam something was LOST— the secret of what we were supposed to be/become. In Jesus for the first time we get a picture of perfect humanity.

Humanity was recovered!

When Adam sinned all the earth was cursed. When Jesus, the Perfect Man, submitted wholly to the Father's will, and resisted temptation He was ministered to by angels, and all the earth was blessed.

But the message is more than just history— more than true stories: the message is as we look to Jesus we find help in our temptation:

III. TEMPTATION AND OUR PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

Jesus did not just TELL us how to defeat Satan. He showed us.

He did not argue or reason with temptation. In every instance he fell back on the written word of God.

Jesus refused to do the right things for the wrong reasons. Later Jesus would feed 5,000 people in the wilderness. After all, he had provided manna for the thousands in the wilderness during the Exodus. Making bread, or showing his power, becoming sovereign over all the earth was never in question, nor were those items the issue. Jesus refused to do the tempter's bidding, refused to step outside the plan God had for His ministry.

He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.

Look to Jesus in his offices:

As Prophet Jesus calls us to choose God's Word, His will, His way over our own. All of us have failed in the past. All of us have faced temptations great and small hundreds of times. Our Prophet calls us to recognize the Tempter in matters of the will— and to choose God's Word! God has spoken!

As Priest Jesus overcomes the sin that does so easily beset us. By His sacrifice on the Cross he has given us power to receive Him and become sons and daughters (John 1:12) of God. He is praying for you and me right NOW! We can overcome as we plead the merits of the blood of Calvary! God has stooped to lift us!

With Jesus in the Wilderness

As King Jesus comes alongside us by His Spirit to "lead us not into temptation, but (to) deliver us from evil." Our King is a Shepherd King—a Physician King— a Presence! God is WITH us right now!

Prayer: You have taught us to pray— "Lead us NOT into temptation, but DELIVER US from evil! Thank You for answering that prayer— for showing how we can flee to You in our need. Amen

Hymn: 636 *Jesus Lover of My Soul*

With Jesus at the Well of Sychar

With Jesus Series 3 of 7

- [With Jesus on the Mountain](#)
- [With Jesus in the Wilderness](#)
- **With Jesus at the Well of Sychar**
- [With Jesus into the Light](#)
- [With Jesus at the Cemetery](#)
- [With Jesus into Holy Week](#)
- [With Jesus into Resurrection Life](#)

March 10, 1996 - Lent 3

John 4:5-42

If ever anyone lived on a dead end street this was the person. And by dead end I don't mean a nice cul de sac where the kids can play and the traffic can turn around. I mean dead end like going nowhere, like abandon all hope. I don't know how, but she had run through five marriages. Five separate stories of tragedy.

It could have been tremendously bad luck, and her husbands had all died. It could have been simply the result of a kind of society where wives were throw-away items, where certainly all women were second class citizens. But anyone who has been married that many times has become very well acquainted with loss and failure.

Maybe the biggest loss of all was this person's loss of any sense of self esteem.

This passage has been studied so thoroughly that we all know, or think we know, how women in the middle east always went for their water early in the day, together, in a community time of fellowship. While the little children played and the latest village gossip was passed, the women carried home their water from the well in the cool of the morning. The scene here is in the blazing light of high noon, when there was usually no one at the well and she could come and go in her loneliness without the added pain of feeling she was part of the gossip being passed along.

I don't know that she was a greater sinner than any of the other men and women of her village. But in her isolation she certainly had to be right up there among the greatest in terms of her pain and needs.

When she arrived at the well she was annoyed just a bit. For there on the curbing of the well sat a stranger. By his dress and his bearing she knew him to be a Jew. She had no idea that her life was about to change and that this man would be the most important person she would ever meet.

She had deliberately chosen this time to come to the well so she could stay away from people. This was a low time in her life. It was a time that she least expected to meet anyone, let alone someone very, very important. She certainly did not have in mind a challenge to her faith that would change her forever. She paused, not quite sure what to expect of this stranger.

The stranger surprised her by asking her for a drink. He looked a little tired, and he evidently was thirsty. The woman was not afraid to voice her surprise. "How come you even speak to me?" she asked.

Social rules were stronger then than we can understand in our society. Some things simply were not done. Jewish men would sooner suffer great thirst than ask a strange woman for a drink.

She let her water jar down and down into the deep well and watched it turn on its side and fill and sink. Then she hauled it hand over hand back to the well curb, and poured the cool water into the stranger's cupped hands. She was amazed that this Jew not only would speak to her, but drink from her water jar— she was ceremonially untouchable, and she made the jar ceremonially unclean. The stranger drank and drank, and then wiped his mouth.

Before he said another word this stranger had said a tremendous amount. He had said 'You are not worthless. You are someone who can help me. You are worth talking to.' He had said "I am not afraid to cross over barriers of gender and race that put people down.' He had even said 'It is all right to ask favors, and reach out to help and

be helped by others.' And he said a lot more beside before he ever opened his mouth again.

But then Jesus DID open his mouth and say a whole lot. As a matter of fact, a part of this story is the longest conversation that is recorded that Jesus ever had with any one individual. And even though I hate to interrupt the flow of the drama, we do have to look at what Jesus told this one shunned and rejected woman. Actually he told her two things that stand out to me, and a third thing than was stunning!

1. He told her something about how people worship. Whenever sincere people seek after God they come under one of the ways Jesus described to this one woman. I'd love to say more about this— but there is more there than I can say now.

Jesus simply said "You Samaritans don't know ... we Jews have heard God's revelation and do know— but there is coming— and now is a higher, deeper way to worship!"

2. And then Jesus spoke some of the most profound words that have ever been spoken on the subject of true worship, of worship as God intends it shall be— the kind of worship, Jesus said, that the heavenly Father goes looking for. Maybe I can address that best by reading a short paragraph of Eugene H. Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

"It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for; those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration."

The longest conversation on record— with a woman who lived on a dead end street, going nowhere! The most profound words about worship— to a person who had probably never heard of philosophy or knew much about Torah.

3. Then- most stunning of all— the first declaration of his Messiahship recorded in the Gospel—She says, "Well— these are wonderful words— and when Messiah comes I'm

sure HE will make them plain!" And the amazing, head-spinning reply she got, and that she believed, were the words: "I that speak unto you— am HE!"

Well, that may not have been the end of our woman's hard times in life, but it certainly shattered her isolation. She left her precious water pot right where it was and headed into the village looking for the people she had been afraid of, the people who had scorned her. And they listened to her! There was something absolutely fascinating to the village people about the genuine faith that had been kindled in this woman many of them knew had been a loser in so many ways. The village emptied at noonday, and streamed out to the edge of town to the well of Sychar, the well of Jacob their forefather. They heard for themselves. They believed. A genuine turning to God of a whole town began.

The transformation of a hopeless woman into a kind of evangel, the transformation of a Samaritan town into a worshiping community began when Jesus asked someone, someone on a dead end street, for a drink.

It makes me think there are no really dead end streets if Jesus is really there. We've probably all been to the well at one time or other. It makes me believe that in the least expected places, and in the strangest times Jesus shows up in the most unexpected ways. He treats us like people of worth— for he values us. He asks us for our help if he needs it.

And then he offers us in return the kind of grace the rich and famous can never buy with all their wealth, and the keenest scholars can never figure out with all their fabulous IQ, and the most powerful politicians cannot legislate with all their hot air. He offers us up the knowledge of who we are, and the hope of who we can be. He helps us look Him in the face and see his purity— and then look ourselves in the mirror and see our possibilities. And before we know it we are even looking our neighbors in the face, whether they are rich or poor, and telling them about a Man who makes us more alive than we ever thought we ever could be.

Prayer - Hymn Closer - 458 *Fill My Cup, Lord*

With Jesus into the Light

With Jesus Series 4 of 7

- With Jesus on the Mountain
- With Jesus in the Wilderness
- With Jesus at the Well of Sychar
- **With Jesus into the Light**
- With Jesus at the Cemetery
- With Jesus into Holy Week
- With Jesus into Resurrection Life

March 17, 1996

20/20 BLINDNESS

John 9:1-41

Did you ever hear the old saying about college students:

*Freshmen know not, and know that they know not;
Sophomores know not, and know not that they know not;
Juniors know, and know not that they know;
Seniors know, and know that they know?*

I don't quite know what to say about that, except I'm not sure I ever met a "pure" freshman who knew that he/she didn't know— and I'm not sure which I am more ashamed of— that I still catch myself being like a sophomore, who doesn't know how much I don't know— or even like a senior who is wise beyond all understanding.

The story today is about knowing; about knowing the most important things in the world. It is a story about the healing of physical blindness. Before the story is over we see there are worse things than not having physical sight. At the end of the story one big question is asked: "ARE WE BLIND?" That is a question we all might want to

dare to ask Jesus. Because NO ONE IS QUITE AS BLIND AS THOSE WHO ARE SURE THEY CAN SEE CLEARLY.

[To the story: John 9:1-14]

You might not think it would be hard to imagine what it would be like never to have seen— to be blind from birth. You could just shut your eyes, you might think. But of course you know that is not the same.

The man in this story got on in the world as best he could, using his other senses. Blindness was a severe handicap, but he made a living, such as it was. Then one day the blind man met Jesus. He didn't know, really, who Jesus was. We are not told how much he had heard about Jesus. By what he told the authorities after he received his sight, the blind man didn't know very much about Him at all.

We have to wonder what in the world inspired such hope and faith in him that he would even listen to Jesus. Then when Jesus did what he did, and told the blind man to do what he was supposed to do— - this man simply went and did as he was told. [What Jesus did: made mud, sent the blind man off in his darkness to wash in the Pool of Siloam}]

I like to think that something warm happened inside the man when Jesus spoke to him. I like to think that grace began to work in him to begin the miracle of faith. That beginning faith might have been as small as simply saying "What do I have to lose!?" Or it may have been inspired by what he had heard of other miracles.

Whatever it was, this man did not deserve to be blind because he had sinned— and he did not deserve to be made well because he was good. We know he was made to see because Jesus took compassion on him; not because he believed in Jesus as Messiah or savior or because he was especially religious or deserving. He simply obeyed, and a miracle took place: He could see!

We have to speculate a bit on what it must have been to experience sight for the first time. To live in a dark world of sounds and smells and jostling, and suddenly to see a donkey for the first time, or a pigeon, or the crowded streets of Jerusalem, or the Temple mount looming above the pool?

Did the blind man have to have help getting home? Did he have to shut his eyes so he could remember where he was?

Finally he got home— and found that he was now quite a celebrity. If he lived now he would certainly make at least the local talk shows on the radio— he might even make Good Morning Israel! on nationwide TV. People began to take notice. It isn't every day a person born blind can see with 20/20 vision by a miracle of God.

So now the people who know everything about everything— who have a faith of rules and regulations that exist to maintain their traditions, rather than traditions that nurture and maintain their faith— these people said, "This is outside OUR control! This is too dangerous!" They moved in.

1. "Number one— nobody does anything or goes anywhere on the Sabbath unless WE say so." [The healing had taken place on the Sabbath.] Of course there were ways to get around Sabbath rules— but they were sure Jesus hadn't bothered to worry his head about that.
2. Number two— this Jesus was the object of grave concern because he had been teaching SPIRITUAL worship— that God must be worshiped by placing HIM at the center of life— instead of by just keeping rigid rules and regulations.
3. Number three— they had to show this man who was really in control of spiritual matters— so they found him and began their interrogation.

This is one of the funniest stories in the Bible, in one way. The interchange between the big shots and the blind man becomes actually almost hilarious.

"Tell us about what happened," they say.

He does.

"Well, this man couldn't be good and do what he did not the Sabbath."

"I think it's pretty good, what he did," says the blind man. "I'm learning to read at 35 years of age!"

"Don't get smart with us," they say. "Maybe you are twin brothers or something." Then, "Let's go and ask his mom and dad."

Mom and Dad don't need trouble with the authorities. They don't want to make any waves.

"No," they say, "we only have the one blind son— he was blind all his life— that's him— he's 35 years old— he can speak for himself." The big shots look the poor man up again.

"Tell us what happened," they say.

"I have already told you about six times," he says. " Are you considering joining the Church of the Nazarene?" Oooh, that one burned!

"Don't be smart with us! We know this man is bad news."

"Bad news, good news—," our friend is getting testy. "All I know is this: I was blind. I can now see 20/20! That is the sum and total of it!"

For his veracity and tenacity the blind man succeeded in getting the high-up people very angry. On the spot they officially excommunicated him. His last hope of heaven, supposedly, was out the window. Their rage must have been a bit sobering even for the ex-blind man, and I'm sure his parents, who didn't want to make trouble, were devastated.

But then comes the best part of the story: Remember, this man had never ever even once seen Jesus. I'm sure Jesus planned it that way. He could have healed him on the spot and when he opened his eyes to see for the first time the first thing he would have seen would have been Jesus instead of that donkey by the pool of Siloam. But Jesus had sent him away to wash.

The blind man didn't know what Jesus looked like— but Jesus looked him up. The disciples said, "Jesus, Master, you know that man you healed last Sabbath day? The authorities have cast him out! His whole neighborhood is buzzing about three visits in one day by the long black robes and all the commotion." So Jesus went looking for him.

And Jesus found him. "Do you believe in Messiah?" Jesus asked.

"Who is Messiah?" answered the man. "I'd like to be able to believe." And then here it came again! Last week to a Samaritan woman, this week to an excommunicated ex-beggar blind man. Jesus reveals to one person the fact that He is the Messiah.

"You're looking at him!" said Jesus.

"Lord, I believe!" said the blind man who now could see in more ways than one. Down on his knees before the Son of God he went.

Then Jesus said one of those enigmatic statements that aren't too difficult to understand if you really want to understand them: "I've come, he said, to help blind people see, and to make those who see become as blind as bats."

Some Pharisees heard him — and they got really upset because they thought they knew what Jesus meant. It was then they asked the question I began this sermon with: "YOU'RE NOT TELLING US THAT WE'RE BLIND, ARE YOU? ARE WE BLIND?"

And Jesus said: "THERE ISN'T ANYONE QUITE AS BLIND AS THE ONE WHO THINKS HE KNOWS EVERYTHING!"

AM I BLIND, JESUS?

If I am a know-it-all, yes!

But if I am in a living connection with Jesus I can say No! I am not blind! The LORD is my Shepherd!

With Jesus as prophet, priest, and king I can see: If my life is centered in Him ('looking unto Jesus'— Hebrews 12:3)

As Prophet he helps me see clearly what is his will,

As Priest he shows me that the cross and the empty tomb are my salvation, and

As King he is the shepherd who leads me even through the (Glen Coe) dark valleys of shadow.

In Chapter 8:12 Jesus said these words: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

With Jesus into the Light

Prayer & Hymn 424 *The Song of the Soul Set Free*

With Jesus at the Cemetery

With Jesus Series 5 of 7

- [With Jesus on the Mountain](#)
- [With Jesus in the Wilderness](#)
- [With Jesus at the Well of Sychar](#)
- [With Jesus into the Light](#)
- **With Jesus at the Cemetery**
- [With Jesus into Holy Week](#)
- [With Jesus into Resurrection Life](#)

March 24, 1996

Ezekiel 37 - The Valley of Bones

John 11 - The Raising of Lazarus

"I am the resurrection and the life . . ." - John 11

The prophet Ezekiel is not the usual fare for devotional Bible reading. Ezekiel is sort of the surrealistic painter of the Bible, who gives us word pictures we could compare with Salvador Dali, or even Picasso. When we think of Ezekiel, if we think of him at all, we wonder where he got the strange visions of wheels within wheels, and descriptions of strange creatures that appear again only in the Book of Revelation. But absolutely none of Ezekiel's visions are more graphic— and yet more absolutely TRUE— than the virtual reality of The Valley of Dry Bones.

EZEKIEL'S VISION

GOD takes the prophet "in the spirit (Spirit)" to a valley. The valley was full of bones. Why the bones were lying on the surface of the ground Ezekiel does not say. he does say that in his vision they were very dry. They would be very unclean to a kosher Israelite.

GOD then asks a "silly" question of the prophet. In spite of the hopelessness of the scene God asks: "Son of man, can these bones live?"

In his vision Ezekiel answers very well indeed: "O Lord God, YOU know!"

GOD then gives a direct command, with promise: Give these bone THE WORD OF THE LORD— tell them there is HOPE— tell them God CARES—

Then in his vision the bones come together— they become bodies—But there still was no breath in the re-created host; so the Spirit spoke again and said, "Call for the WIND— the RUACH— the Spirit—" and the Spirit came into the assembled host. The resurrection was complete. They were hale and healthy before his eyes. This is the vision of The Valley of Dry Bones.

GOD EXPLAINS THE VISION to Ezekiel— this valley of dead, dry bones is where my people are right now— and I am sending you to tell them "I will put my Spirit in you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own place, your own possession— the place I want you to be!"

This is a story about HOPE, and about GOD, and about the power of God's WORD: THE RAISING OF LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

John 11 repeats the message. There is HOPE when God speaks! Only this is no vision. Jesus demonstrated his authority over life and death. That miracle carried His disciples into what lay ahead. The raising of Lazarus is about HOPE and about GOD and about the power of God's WORD: it is our reminder in these days before Good Friday and Easter that Jesus is Lord, and that He is in charge even on His way to the Cross.

DRY BONES AND GOD'S WORD TODAY

So how do these two stories apply to us on March 24, 1996? What do they tell us to help us where we are on our spiritual journey right now? I SEE TWO POWERFUL POSSIBILITIES:

1. Sometimes we may have to identify with the BONES! Or maybe with Martha or Mary. Or even good old Thomas, who said "I'll go along with Jesus but I can't see anything good..."

Like the people of God in Ezekiel's time there may be times we think our situation is hopeless, or that God has forgotten. Yes, MAYBE there are times when WE ARE THE DRY BONES. We identify with the sisters, or even Lazarus.. waiting for the word of God to penetrate— listening— responding. And I believe the word of God still moves in darkness and chaos and dryness and death.

2. But sometimes GOD may call on us to identify with Ezekiel himself! There are times when God lets us get into the valley of dry bones because He needs a prophet who can speak His word.

ILLUSTRATION:

It must have been 15 years or more, during prayer meeting, a recent E.N.C. grad who was doing Social Work in the toughest sections of inner city Boston stood to testify. Her name was Cindy Knox, and I had a lot of confidence in her character and her walk with God. She gave a testimony that night that in my mind has become a classic.

She was in a particularly unpleasant, unhealthy situation, where children were neglected or abused. She said she actually said half aloud, "Oh God! Where are YOU!" And she almost had anger in her voice in the prayer,

But then Cindy said immediately she had the answer, almost as if God had spoken audibly. He said, "I'm in YOU, Cindy!"

"I AM IN YOU, CINDY!" God challenged Cindy to bring His Presence where she went, and through that challenge, which I never forgot, God challenged those of us who heard her testimony as well.

ILLUSTRATION

Three weeks ago Helen and I were in Florida for a week's rest. During that week I saw posters all over the place— in Sarasota, Bradenton, the Sun Coast— about an interdenominational evangelistic campaign with an evangelist, Steve Wingfield. As I was dressing on Sunday morning we turned on the TV and in the broadcast service of Sarasota First Baptist worship, there was this Steve Wingfield preaching from the

book of Joshua. Then we ate breakfast and went to Bradenton First Nazarene , and guess who was the speaker that morning? Steve Wingfield.

I thought Steve Wingfield preached a good sermon that day. But what I remember was his personal testimony. I spoke later with Bradenton pastor Thurl Mann about Evangelist Wingfield. He was just as impressed as I was. It reminded me of this challenge God gave to Cindy Knox. God called Steve Wingfield to a valley of dry bones, too:

Steve Wingfield told about his own conversion, which interested me, because he was the son of a minister (Methodist.) He rebelled quite a while, and was saved in his early 20's.

He told of how when he was saved he worked for an ambulance service in Virginia; and told how he hoped God would help him get a different job before he went away to seminary because he had been one of the gang that was pretty rough in words and actions...

God challenged him to go back and witness to every one of the 18 employees. It must have been like Ezekiel felt, being told to preach to a valley of dry bones.

The toughest one for Steve was his partner. They were good friends, but he got an awful hard time from him. Then one night shift when they were on call his partner shook him awake and said, "I have been troubled. i want what you have been talking about." The Spirit of the Lord was blowing over the dry bones. (ALL 18 GAVE THEIR HEARTS TO THE LORD BEFORE A YEAR WAS OVER...)

I wish I knew all the details of Steve Wingfield's story. Maybe sometime you can get to meet him yourself.

There is great POWER in the word of the Lord.

God's WORD called this world into being. God's WORD brought Lazarus from his tomb.

God's WORD is in your heart— and in your mouth it can bring HOPE where you are!

IF IN OUR WORLD WE WONDER, LIKE CINDY KNOX, "WHERE IS GOD?" IT MAY BE WE WILL HEAR HIM SAY TO US "I'M IN YOU! SPEAK MY WORD TO THESE DRY BONES!"

Prayer: 543 *Let Your Heart Be Broken* or No 572 *He Hideth My Soul*

With Jesus into Holy Week

With Jesus Series 6 of 7

- With Jesus on the Mountain
- With Jesus in the Wilderness
- With Jesus at the Well of Sychar
- With Jesus into the Light
- With Jesus at the Cemetery
- **With Jesus into Holy Week**
- With Jesus into Resurrection Life

March 31, 1996

Matthew 21:1-11

We have followed Jesus during this Lenten Season as he sat by a well and talked with a Samaritan woman about living water and about worship. We have listened in the night hours on the housetop as he told Nicodemus, "You must be born again."

We have watched him search out the man born blind who had been excommunicated by the religious authorities after he had been healed and would not say Jesus was evil. We heard him tell him his Messiah knew and cared, and that it would be all right. We began the Lenten journey in the desert of temptation, and in the last week have gone with Jesus to the tomb of his friend Lazarus, and we have seen the power of the Word of God to rebuke the tempter, and when spoken from Christ's lips, to bring a dead man back from the grave.

There remains just one more week to complete the journey, and celebrate the Resurrection, that day in which all human hope centers. But what a tremendous week this will be! What a journey, through the Last Supper, and the Garden, and Calvary and the Grave!

With the Passion staring Him in the face, we might ask, why should there be a parade? Why the waving of palms and shouting of hosannas? Didn't Jesus know what was going to happen?

The answer is of course Jesus knew. On this last journey to Jerusalem (Matthew 20:18) Jesus told the disciples "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day he will rise again."

SO, WHY THE PARADE AT ALL? Matthew records the crowds in Jerusalem that day as being "moved." They asked the question, "WHO IS THIS?" And the people in the parade answered back: "THIS IS JESUS, THE PROPHET FROM NAZARETH OF GALILEE." Which (statement) was true as far as it went.

WHY THE PARADE? We remember a chorus we learned as children: "Everybody ought to know who Jesus is!" And the people themselves really didn't know if Jesus was a prophet, or a deluded pretender— or an unwitting victim of what was going to come that week of Passover. But Jesus knew! And this parade was a statement of His authority.

The Triumphal Entry was a Necessary Part of the Plan

The parade was a deliberate statement that Jesus was not a martyr, taken by surprise and afterward made into a hero by his followers. Rather, Jesus was telling them then, so they could understand later— and telling us now, so we can see with the 20/20 vision of hindsight, that the Cross was a battle, not an execution, and that sin and death and hell were being squarely faced, not merely accepted as inevitable.

The triumphant Entry tells us:

I AM THE KING OF PEACE

Jesus was making no mistake. He was declaring that he was the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus arranged himself for the donkey and the colt. It was a festive time, with people on hand for the high holy days. They were ready for celebration. But

Jesus was also fulfilling scripture. (Zechariah 14:4) He knew where the week would take him, and yet he encouraged the cries of "Hosanna!" When the authorities told him he was on an ego trip Jesus replied with the self-knowledge of the Son of God "If these do not praise me on my way to the Cross, the very rocks and stones in the streets will cry out. Their Creator is passing!"

The Triumphant Entry begins the Pascal Procession:

I AM THE LAMB OF GOD

The words of the Psalm that closes the "hallel" portion of the Psalter, the hymn that Jesus no doubt sang the night he transformed the Passover into the Eucharist, Holy Communion, come to mind— the words we heard that opened the service and began the procession into the sanctuary today:

"This is the day!

"The stone the builders rejected— is to become the chief stone of the corner"

"Bind the festal sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar!"

The procession to the high altar had begun! The sacrifice was willingly on its way!

The Triumphal Entry says Love Can and Will Triumph

I AM HE THAT HAVE THE KEYS OF DEATH AND OF HELL

Luke is the evangelist that records that this joyous parade was interrupted as Jesus paused on the hillside overlooking the temple mount and wept over the city of Jerusalem. There was sorrow there— but it was not for himself that Jesus wept.

Closing words:

There remains just one more week to complete the journey, and celebrate the Resurrection, that day in which all human hope centers. What a tremendous week this will be! What a journey, through the Last Supper, and the Garden, and Calvary and the Grave! With the Battle for Our Souls just ahead, the story this morning is not a complete one. It will be next Sunday. Until then I challenge you to watch and wait with me— in worship and praise for what our Lord has done!

With Jesus into Holy Week

Closing prayer - Dexter sings "Too High a Price"

IF NOT - (232 Lead Me to Calvary)

With Jesus into Resurrection Life

With Jesus Series 7 of 7

- [With Jesus on the Mountain](#)
- [With Jesus in the Wilderness](#)
- [With Jesus at the Well of Sychar](#)
- [With Jesus into the Light](#)
- [With Jesus at the Cemetery](#)
- [With Jesus into Holy Week](#)
- **With Jesus into Resurrection Life**

April 7, 1996

What Easter REALLY Means

Revelation 1:17 Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and of Hades.

MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS of Easter are in the Great Depression, when, although I don't recall being "poor," I do recall how often we were literally "penniless." And yet somehow Easter was special— Easter we boiled eggs and colored them— Easter my mother somehow always took us to church looking fresh and scrubbed and greased and creased— and usually wearing something brand new— even in the Depression.

I got the idea that Easter was important— and of course that the Resurrection was the central thing about Easter.

EASTER REALLY MEANS RESURRECTION

ALL MY YEARS as a Christian pastor I have seen Easter as important, and have seen the Resurrection as the center of what Easter stands for. But I think there has been a subtle change as I have been growing older. I no longer see the Resurrection as the most important part of Easter. I see the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as the heart and

soul of all our faith, and Easter is an important part of the Resurrection, and not the other way around. As Paul wrote some twenty years or so after the Crucifixion, in 1 Corinthians 15:14 "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." It is as simple as that.

HOW MANY TIMES have we heard this Resurrection Day story? How can we hear it again as for the first time? J. B. Phillips was a translator of the scriptures. I remember when his translation seemed very modern indeed, and his words still carry a freshness. I came again recently across his words about translating the resurrection passages in Corinthians. He wrote:

For me, the translator, this fifteenth chapter seemed alive and vibrant, not with pious hope, but with inspired certainty. Quite suddenly I realized that NO MAN HAD EVER WRITTEN SUCH WORDS BEFORE. As I pressed on with the task of translation I came to feel utterly convinced of the truth of the Resurrection. Something of literally life-and-death importance had happened in mortal history, and I was reading the actual words of the people who had seen Christ after his resurrection and had seen men and women deeply changed by his living power. Previously, although I had known something of the "comfort of the scriptures" and had never thought them to be false, I must have been insulated from their reality simply because they were known as "Scripture." Now I was compelled to come to the closest possible terms with this writing, and I was enormously impressed, and still am. On the one hand these letters (of Paul) were written over quite a period of years, but there is not the slightest discernible diminution of faith. And on the other hand, it was borne in upon me with irresistible force that these letters could never have been written at all if there had been no Jesus Christ, no Crucifixion, and no Resurrection.

Easter IS Resurrection— and specifically, the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the grave. So actually Easter means specifically JESUS IS ALIVE—

EASTER REALLY MEANS A LIVING SAVIOR

JESUS LIVES AS OUR PROPHET OF THE ETERNAL WORD

When Jesus appeared to the eleven that same evening of the day he rose from the dead he said these words (Luke 24:44) "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." In other words the Risen Savior was making the flat statement that the Old Testament Scriptures existed to help us know who Jesus is, in order that we might come to understand what God wants us to know of Himself. When Jesus appeared to the two on the Road to Emmaus (in that same chapter in the Gospel) he warms their hearts, and enlightens their understanding by beginning with Moses and the Prophets and speaking to them from the scriptures the things concerning Himself.

JESUS LIVES AS OUR HIGH PRIEST IN GOD'S PRESENCE

When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (in the passage in John read this morning) he made it clear where he was heading. "Do not hold on to me," he said (John 20:17), "for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " The Prophet awakens us to the truth of God, and to our need to be holy so we can walk with God in fellowship, as God intended in Creation. But the Priest makes a way for us to come to God. He bears the sacrifice of his own life into the Holy of Holies for our sins and infirmities, so that he can assure us we may call His Father OUR Father, and His God OUR God!

JESUS LIVES AS OUR OMNIPOTENT KING FOREVER

Jesus rose from the Tomb as the Sovereign of an entirely NEW WAY OF LIFE. He never "LOST" His life— Our KING LAID IT DOWN as a sacrifice to take it again forever as the Conqueror of death and evil.

Because the Risen Savior could say, (Matthew 28:18) "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always,

to the very end of the age."— because He could say THAT— we are citizens of a NEW KIND OF KINGDOM— A NEW WAY OF LIVING.

Other kings have kingdoms that pass away. Jesus says His kingdom will not pass away. Eternal life is not just this life patched up and going on forever and ever. It is beyond the bounds we know as time and space— more real than we can now understand. In a beautiful passage in *The Everlasting Man*, in a chapter called "The Strangest Story Ever Told" G. K. Chesterton wrote these powerful words:

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized the new wonder; but even they hardly realized the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in the semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn.

Easter is Resurrection, and Easter is a Living Savior. But Easter is of absolutely no lasting worth to you and me until Easter becomes very personal. And I am happy to tell you on the authority of God's Word this Easter Sunday that

EASTER REALLY MEANS THE GIFT OF LIFE BY GOD'S GRACE

ROMANS 10:9,10 tells how simple, really, it is to become a part of Christ's kingdom. "Confess with the mouth— believe with the heart that God has raised Him from the dead..." IF YOU TRULY BELIEVE JESUS IS ALIVE, YOU ARE BLESSED. Do you believe? 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16,17 indicates that even we, who have not seen the glorified, risen Lord can know Him. If you truly want to believe ask Jesus to walk with you in your seeking. He is nearer just now than you may imagine.

INVITATION TO CONFESS JESUS AS LORD!

Prayer "He is Lord, He is Lord...He is Risen from the Dead and He is Lord.."