



Easter

- WITH -
THE SUMMIT

DEVOTIONAL

All Hail King Jesus

Introduction

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). This proclamation from John the Baptist inaugurates Jesus’ ministry, resonates throughout his life, death, and resurrection, and still calls out to each of us today. Jesus, the King, has come, and the kingdom of heaven has begun on earth.

By the end of Matthew, though, we find the King crowned not with glory but with the thorns of our disobedience, and not ascending high but descending low into the grave that we deserved.

But death could not hold him, and he rose again—conquering our final enemy. “Therefore God has highly exalted him” (Philippians 2:9). Right now, King Jesus is ruling and reigning on high, and he will return again in glory to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated. To bring the kingdom of heaven in all its fullness, to cover the world with disciples from all nations—where “every knee [will] bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10–11).

And so this Easter, we proclaim along with John the Baptist, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and in so doing, we follow King Jesus’ final commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

To do that, we’ll spend the two weeks leading up to Easter reading together through the Gospel of Matthew, where over and over we will hear of the kingdom of heaven. Then, after Easter, we will read through Philippians and remember the ongoing work of our King, who was made low and is now reigning on high.

Discipleship Happens in Relationship

We've designed for you to experience this devotional in community. Across the book of Matthew, Jesus teaches groups, not just individuals, and the book of Philippians is addressed to a church family. So to honor the fact that God usually speaks to individuals from within a group, we've designed this devotional for you to listen to God's voice with others.

So as you prepare to embark on this three-week journey on the road to Easter and beyond, invite two to three people to read through this devotional every day and discuss what you're learning. This could be face-to-face (especially if they live with or near you), in a group text, or through a phone call—or you can mix and match, and do a little bit of each of those.

If there are kids in your home, we have included a single question on each day's devotional to stimulate conversation around the day's scripture. We recommend reading the scripture aloud and then engaging in discussion together at the same time each day before ending with prayer. This option is simple enough to be done at the dinner table or in the car.

We can't wait to see how God moves in our church family through this journey!¹

¹ All Scripture quotations are from The ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version).

Day 1

Repent and Proclaim

Christy Thornton

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” - Matthew 3:2

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This proclamation from John the Baptist inaugurates Jesus’ ministry, resonates throughout his life all the way to the empty tomb, and still calls out to each of us today. Jesus, the King, has come, and the kingdom of heaven has begun on earth.

All across Matthew’s Gospel, the announcement of the kingdom of heaven rings out—from the wilderness through John the Baptist, to Jesus’ mountain sermon, and echoing through the streets of cities and villages across Judea. Because Jesus, the King, has arrived, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:7).

By the end of Matthew, though, we find the King crowned not with glory but with the thorns of our disobedience, and not ascending high but descending low into the grave that we deserved.

But death could not hold him, and he rose again—conquering our final enemy. “Therefore God has highly exalted him” (Philippians 2:9). Right now, King Jesus is ruling and reigning on high, and he will return again in glory to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated. To bring the kingdom of heaven in all its fullness, to cover the world with disciples from all nations—where “every knee [will] bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10–11).

We will hear the gospel call to repent. Which may sound scary, but the call of repentance is an invitation to come home—to turn from your wandering away from God and come back to his kingdom filled with love and peace. And we will join in heralding the kingdom right here and right now as we proclaim along with John the Baptist, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And in so doing, we follow King Jesus’ final commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Respond: Ask God to show you any area of sin in your heart. Repent. Turn back to God and delight that his kingdom has come. Tell a friend (or two) how God is working in your life, and invite them to walk through this Easter devotional with you over the next three weeks.

Family Discussion: What does it mean to repent, and why are we called to do it?

Day 2

Follow Me

Megan Willis

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” - Matthew 4:19–20

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” - Matthew 6:33

When Jesus called his first disciples, their response was immediate. They didn't check their calendars or consider what they might be leaving behind. They didn't phone a friend or make a list of all the pros and cons. They left their nets and followed him. No hesitation. No delay.

We get so caught up in the day-to-day that we try to force-fit Jesus into everything else we have going on—school, work, chores, hobbies, relationships, keeping up with commitments, and just making it through the week.

Instead of rearranging our lives around Jesus, we try to squeeze him into the margins.

But Jesus doesn't call us to convenience. He doesn't call us to pencil him in when life slows down. He calls us to lay everything at his feet and follow him immediately. The disciples believed that whatever Jesus offered was exactly what they needed.

Jesus is still calling for us to trust him in the same way.

When we seek God's kingdom first, he promises to take care of the rest. Seeking God first means putting him above everything else in life—our schedules, our plans, our responsibilities, and even our worries and fears. As we follow Jesus first and foremost, he is faithful to lead and care for us.

Jesus will lead us to different places. Some he leads across the world as career missionaries. Others he leads into boardrooms, classrooms, or hospital rooms. Some of us he leads to fix another leak, change another diaper, or serve another meal.

But no matter where he leads us, Jesus' call is the same—come follow me, and seek my kingdom first.

Respond: Are you following Jesus and seeking him first? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you what causes you to hesitate in following Jesus. Repent and return. Share what the Spirit shows you with a friend, and ask them to help you remember that we find joy through obeying Jesus because he loves us.

Family Discussion: How can we seek the kingdom of God?

Day 3

One Road, Two Directions

Eddy Gil

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” - Matthew 7:13–14

The inauguration of the kingdom of God comes with an invitation. It is not restrictive, but it is exclusive. Anyone is welcome—regardless of background, social status, ethnicity, or past sins. But those who enter must do so on God’s terms. After all, it’s *his* kingdom. Unlike a prestigious event that posts a bouncer at the gate to keep people out, Christ desires to have as many people enter as possible. The problem is that the guests often don’t want to enter his way.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the journey into his kingdom. The gate to the kingdom of God is narrow and uncomfortable. It requires us to bend the knee, humble ourselves, and crawl through it. The gate that leads to destruction, on the other hand, is wide and spacious, making the journey easy and convenient, leaving plenty of room for our pride to expand.

People get so distracted by the gate’s narrowness that they miss what’s most important—where it leads. The narrow gate leads to abundant life in Christ, while the wide gate leads to death and sorrow. Sadly, many misjudge the destination by the difficulty of the journey and choose the comfortable way, never realizing that true, everlasting comfort lies in the opposite direction.

The biblical picture of repentance is a change of direction. Some of us picture Jesus’ words as a fork in the road, where we choose between two paths. But a more accurate picture is a single road: one direction heading upward, narrowing with every step, and the other heading downward, widening as it goes.

Whether we realize it or not, we all begin our journey heading downward—until we hear the voice of Jesus, standing in the middle of the road. He calls us to repent, to turn around and follow him

onward and upward. As we do, he invites us to do the same for others: to walk alongside them, urging them to turn around and choose the strenuous way that leads to everlasting rest.

Jesus never promised the journey into the kingdom of God would be easy. In fact, if we feel consistently comfortable, it may be a sign that we're drifting downward. But God does promise he will be with us, to sustain us and bring us to the end—and that makes the journey worth all the struggles along the way.

Respond: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas in your life where you are choosing the easy way that leads to destruction, and plead for the strength to turn around. As we approach Easter, who is one person that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to pursue—and what is one concrete step you can take this week to move toward them?

Family Discussion: In what ways is following God hard? Why should we choose the hard way?

Day 4

Faith in a God of Miracles

Molly Spragins

“Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord.’” - Matthew 9:28

Matthew 9 and 10 are jam-packed with Jesus performing miracles, challenging the Pharisees, and sending his disciples. It’s like a 90-second Instagram reel filled with snapshots from a long trip. Each snippet offers a tiny piece of the overall picture, and together, they construct a beautiful mosaic of who Jesus is and how we should respond to him.

Strong faith emerges as the uniting theme threaded throughout the montage—Matthew being called to leave his lucrative job and follow Jesus, the bleeding woman believing that touching Jesus’ robes would heal her, the man with faith that Jesus could heal his daughter who had died, and the blind men who had faith and ended up with their sight restored!

In Matthew 9:2, we see loyal friends going out of their way to help a paralyzed man. It says, “And when Jesus saw *their* faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven’” (emphasis added). Their faith. *The faith of his friends*. You may have someone in your life who you are carrying to Jesus. Maybe Jesus will see your faith and help your ailing friend.

It’s like when Moses obeys and demands that Pharaoh let God’s people go. Pharaoh refuses and doubles down, increasing the workload of the Israelites and punishing this already crushed people even further. The Israelites lose faith because of their suffering, but Moses continues in obedience and has faith *for them*. God called Moses, and Moses believed him to do miracles for the people of Israel!

Matthew even depicts Jesus as the new Moses, who has faith for us when we lose faith in the midst of suffering. In the end, Jesus is the friend whose faith accomplishes miracles.

God is not dependent on us to accomplish his plan. But what a wondrous thing he did for each person in these chapters because of their faith in him, the God of miracles! What would they have missed out on had they not taken the risk, the step of faith, to expect God for a miracle?

Let us pray for more faith in Jesus—to be expectant that he will do what he says he'll do and lavish on us the joys of healing, freedom, and life everlasting.

Respond: If you know someone with a broken spirit, ask the Lord to heal them. Stand in the gap. Pray on their behalf and believe that the Lord will act. Tell or remind them today of God's goodness to us through Jesus. If you feel broken in suffering, ask the Lord for faith to help your unbelief, and ask a trusted friend to have faith on your behalf!

Family Discussion: If God can do anything, why does our faith matter?

Day 5

Life under King Jesus' Authority

Noah Cowfer

“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.’”
- Matthew 11:2–6

When earthly kings usher in their kingdom, they do so through oppression and death. When Jesus ushers in his kingdom, he does so through healing and life. Jesus points to Isaiah’s prophecies about him (Isaiah 35 and 61) to show that this new kingdom begins with healing and relief for a broken world.

Jesus gave sight to the blind so they could see his face; he gave legs to the lame so they could follow him; he cleansed lepers so they could be close to him; he gave ears to the deaf so they could hear his voice; and he even gave life to the dead so they could be raised to walk in newness of life with him—just like Isaiah said he would. He is the king of a new kind of kingdom.

It’s hard to imagine how a kingdom filled with such vibrant goodness could be offensive to anyone. But the kingdom of God requires absolute allegiance. We love to hold onto a Jesus who brings healing, forgives our sins, or comforts us when we feel alone. Clearly, Jesus does all of those things! But that very same Jesus also assumes the authority to tell us how to live our lives—to turn away from loving any other—and compels us to live life a different way.

King Jesus requires that we repent of any contrary allegiance and relinquish all authority over our lives to him.

For Jesus, repentance and the kingdom of heaven go hand in hand. Both he and John preached the same message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). You can’t have one without the other.

As we prepare our hearts for Easter, let’s reflect on Jesus’ words and ask ourselves: “Is this the kind of kingdom I want to be a part of, and if so, then where in my life am I resisting Jesus’ authority and living life on my own terms?” The good news of the gospel is that when we repent and submit to Jesus’ authority over us, we receive the joy of all of his benefits. God promised that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Respond: Give praise to Jesus as the King who rightly deserves to rule over all things. Ask Jesus to reveal areas in your life where you have resisted submitting to his authority, and when he reveals them, repent and turn to live life his way. If you’ve never submitted to Jesus’ authority as Lord over your life, pray to receive his free gift of salvation, and talk with a pastor or friend about your decision. Tell a friend what God is doing in your life!

Family Discussion: What do these verses say about the reasons Jesus performed miracles?

Day 6

To You It Has Been Given

Jasmine Whitehead

“And he answered them, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ... But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.’” - Matthew 13:11, 16

Imagine the scene: Jesus seated on a boat, slowly rocking as the waves rolled, addressing a sea of people on shore with cryptic story after cryptic story, with no explanation. Still puzzled, the crowd dissolves. Then, the disciples approach him in their confusion, with hope that the teacher will bring clarity.

I love this story, but just like the crowds, I could not fully understand Jesus’ words in the Bible that I had heard most of my life—until I met the Teacher, and he opened my eyes to the Scripture through the Holy Spirit. If you follow Jesus and have had that same experience, praise God!

Today, I’ve been asking you to think back to a confusing passage of Scripture. You probably had feelings of frustration and confusion. Maybe you were even distraught as you read. Then miraculously, out of the blue, it made sense! It wasn’t magic. It wasn’t discipline. God himself illuminated your spiritual eyes and ears by his Spirit so that you might grow even deeper in your connection with our God and Savior.

In vv. 14–15 of this chapter, Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah: “‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’”

Where has your heart “grown dull” from lack of faith in Jesus? When God wants to speak to you through his divine Word, the Bible, are you listening? Are you seeking clarity from Jesus, like the

disciples did? Are your eyes and ears open to receive what he says? Where have your eyes been closed to truths in Scripture? Where have your ears barely been able to hear the Lord speaking?

Tyler Staton says that God's voice is like the touch of a feather—light enough to ignore but clear enough to engage and respond if you choose.² Will you choose to respond to God's voice today?

Respond: Listen to “Open the Eyes of My Heart” by Michael W. Smith while you sit with your hand over your eyes or heart. Ask the Lord to open your eyes and speak into the parts of your heart where you need faith and understanding. Write down and share with a friend what you experienced while doing this.

Family Discussion: How can these verses guide our prayers?

² Tyler Staton, *The Familiar Stranger: (Re)Introducing the Holy Spirit to Those in Search of an Experiential Spirituality* (Thomas Nelson, 2025), 125.

Day 7

The Long Road to Victory

Jacob Tarver

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’” - Matthew 16:24–25

Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. In less than a week, the same people would go from welcoming Jesus by shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9) to condemning Jesus by demanding, “Let him be crucified!” (Matthew 27:23). A lot can happen in a week.

What strikes me as I think about Palm Sunday is this: Jesus knew his destination would be the cross as he rode into Jerusalem. He knew those celebrating and praising him would soon deny him and demand his death. Yet, he still traveled the road before him. What would compel Jesus to do this?

The palm branch is symbolic of victory, which is what the people shouting “Hosanna” wanted—victory over the Romans who had taken their land—and they thought Jesus was the one to lead them. Jesus came to bring victory, just in a much different way than the Jewish people were expecting.

Our humble King Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah, which says that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem “righteous and having salvation ... humble and mounted on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). Jesus persevered on the path laid before him all the way to Calvary, where he bled and died for sinners like you and me. The feelings of loss, fear, sadness, and defeat would three days later be resurrected in victory. Victory over sin, Satan, and death. That’s the victory Jesus came to accomplish for you and me!

So yes, he knew the road before him as he rode into town, and he traveled it anyway. He calls each of us to follow him on the way to the cross too. We follow Jesus as we take up his cross and lose our own lives, that we might find life in him.

He loved us so much that he would die for us on the cross, and we love him back by giving him all that we are, and in doing so, we have life.

Respond: *Pray out loud:* “Jesus, thank you for riding toward the cross for me. Help me take up my cross and trust you with _____, even when it’s hard.” Share with a Christian friend what’s hard, and let them encourage you. Listen to “To the Lamb” by Summit Worship to help you surrender everything you are to Jesus today.

Family Discussion: What does it mean to deny ourselves so that we can follow Jesus?

Day 8

Between Lockers and Mountains

Tiffany Pollard

“Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.’” - Matthew 17:19–20

I was 15 when they gave it to me. A small gold necklace with an even smaller mustard seed attached to the end. I'd clutch it tight when things got tough—that tiny kernel. I'd slip to my locker between classes and just stand there, holding the charm. Reflecting on Jesus' words: “If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples after the demon had resisted. After they'd needed his help to heal the boy. And they were perplexed. “Why could we not cast it out?” they asked.

Jesus' answer: faith.

King Jesus asked them to trust him, and he's still asking us to trust him today.

From the moment you confessed him as Lord to wherever you are right now, the call is the same. “Will you let me carry you? Lead you? Do miracles in your life? In the lives of others?”

Imagine a tiny mustard seed laying in the palm of your hand, not much larger than a letter on this page. Maybe look up a picture of one, or draw one in your journal. Look at them and remember King Jesus gave up everything for you.

Your faith may be small, but you're placing it in a great God. There is none greater, none stronger. Where you are weak, he is strong. Ask him to fill you with faith wherever you find yourself faithless today, whether a school locker between classes, in the bathroom between meetings, or

in the car between errands. Slip away and remember Jesus' promises to do big things with a little faith.

In the words of Corrie Ten Boom, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."³

Respond: Pray and ask God to fill you with a simple, beautiful faith today. Ask him to give you the courage to pray as much as you plan. Then, journal or tell a friend all the ways you've seen God show up in the last 24 hours.

Family Discussion: This verse is not about the size of the disciples' faith; what is it about?

³ Michelle Hanna Ministries, accessed February 2026,
<https://michellehannaministries.com/unknown-future-known-god/>.

Day 9

Receiving, Not Earning

Kristy Wallace

“And behold, a man came up to him, saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.’” - Matthew 19:16–17

The young man described in Matthew 19 asked the wrong question: “What good deed must I *do*?” He wanted a cut-and-dried, cause and effect, action and reaction kind of answer. He started with the assumption that he was a generally good guy. He was successful and well-behaved—certainly not in need of radical correction. Worst-case scenario, he was looking for a checklist to make himself feel better.

And yet, Jesus asked for more than the man expected—for him to leave everything and follow him. The young man was dissatisfied with Jesus’ response and walked away filled with sorrow, not because he couldn’t have eternal life, but because he couldn’t *earn* it.

Do you ever struggle with the urge to earn your salvation? Maybe it shows up in the form of guilt over your lack of discipline or shame regarding your sin. Or maybe you feel pretty good about yourself, expending all of your time and energy in an effort to “do the right thing.”

Friends, Jesus did not die and conquer death for nothing, just to give you a to-do list to be saved. He has done the work. He has made a way. He has already earned your salvation. He simply wants you to trust in his finished work alone, to leave behind everything else and follow him.

Before any person is baptized in our congregation, we ask this very important question: Do you believe that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for you to be saved? This season of remembrance is a time to set our hearts and minds on the one who offers abundant life to all freely, with only one requirement: You must admit that you *need* Jesus to save you and confess him as the only one who can. If you’ve trusted that Jesus earned your salvation, don’t carry on

living as if there's still work to be done! Instead, live in freedom, gratitude, and joy, sharing with others the love and kindness you have received freely, for the glory of King Jesus.

Respond: Be brave. Take out a sheet of paper and write down things you have done to try and earn your salvation. Name the moments of pride in your own work. Pray that the Spirit would reveal these to you. Confess them each aloud to God, repent, and return, asking his forgiveness and acknowledging his finished work. Pray that God would help you trust Jesus for your whole and lasting salvation. Share with someone who can remind you of Jesus' finished work!

Family Discussion: If doing good things can't save us, why do we do them?

Day 10

The Humble King

Griff Crews

“This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”” - Matthew 21:4–5

One of the most majestic scenes in a movie is when the hero arrives to save the day on a magnificent horse. Whether it is Gandalf arriving on Shadowfax through the piercing of the dawn or Flynn Rider storming in on Maximus, heroes arrive on horses. Even in ancient times, kings rode horses to demonstrate their strength and power.

Yet, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he intentionally chose not a horse but a donkey. That would be as shocking as an elected official arriving at their inauguration on a four-wheeler instead of in a limo. So why does Jesus choose a baby beast of burden?

Matthew says this takes place to fulfill Zechariah’s prophecy: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem demonstrated his character. He is a *humble* king.

Jesus is not domineering but “gentle and lowly” (Matthew 11:29). He is the type of person that the tired and broken can come to without being crushed or worn down. All of us can run to Jesus, the approachable King.

Is that you? Are you tired, broken, or worn down today? Come to Jesus, the humble King, who bears your burdens with you.

Jesus’ humility means that no matter what sin you have committed, he renders his judgments with grace and truth. He will tell you that you have broken the law, and in his grace, he paid your

debt so that you can enter his kingdom. There is nothing you have done that can keep you from his love. If you feel the weight of your sin today, cry out with the crowd, “Hosanna—Lord, save us.” He entered Jerusalem to do everything necessary to save you, and he saves all who call on him.

Rarely, if ever, were kings known for their humility. But Jesus came to be a humble King, which is still good news today. So let’s boldly run to Jesus and thank him for being a humble King today.

Respond: Pray and thank Jesus for being a humble King. Tell him where you feel broken, overwhelmed, or burdened. Thank him for coming as King to save you. Listen to “Redeemed” by Summit Worship to help you remember your humble King today.

Family Discussion: How is Jesus the same as, different from, or better than other kings?

Day 11

The Unmistakable King

Patrick Downing

“For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ... Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” - Matthew 24:27, 30

Several years ago, lightning struck a tree just a couple of feet from where I stood.

Honestly, I was shook. The crack split the air. My ears rang. My whole body tingled, not from pain, but from every nerve firing at once. I dropped to my knees, disoriented. The world stopped. I made myself small, falling to my knees, shoulders bending inward, face flat to the ground, my whole body overcome by a single flash of power I could not command or ignore.

Jesus says his return will be like that.

Not hidden. Not subtle. Not something you miss if you're looking the other way. Lightning in a massive storm doesn't creep across the sky, hoping you notice. No, it tears across the heavens, setting them ablaze from east to west. Unmissable. Undeniable.

When the disciples asked about the end and his second coming, Jesus answered, knowing what they would face. Turmoil on earth. Wars and rumors of wars. Political chaos. Sickness. Disease. Crazy people and crazy weather. People would know their need for a savior, and false messiahs would rise, claiming to be the true one. People would be desperate to find a king to save them from their enemies.

We know that temptation all too well. We look for kings too—favorite voices, commentators, musicians, movie stars, government officials. We even like to make ourselves king, trusting in our own wisdom, instincts, and ability to control things. We feel like we can find someone to rule our little kingdoms just fine, until something bigger reminds us we can't.

When the Son of Man finally comes on the clouds with great power and glory, there won't be any doubt. Your favorite politician is not the king. Your favorite actor or athlete is not the king. You are *definitely* not the king.

Only Jesus is King.

For those who have submitted to him already, that day brings incredible joy and fulfillment. The one we trusted in our hearts fills the sky. But in the end, every knee will bow—some in joy, others in terror of Jesus' victory.

The King is coming. Will you be ready?

Respond: Find a quiet spot, and look up at the sky. Imagine the flash of the King's return. Say, "Jesus, you are King, and I submit to you today." Commit to live *this* day in light of *that* day. Then, tell someone who doesn't know Jesus who he is and that he is coming back. Help them get ready for his return by telling them the good news of his life, death, and resurrection.

Family Discussion: How does Jesus coming back one day finish the story of the gospel?

Day 12

Searing Loss

Trevor Forbis

“Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” - Matthew 26:39

January 12, 2024, is a date forever etched into the tablet of my soul. I remember picking up the phone on that cold, overcast day to the sound of cries from my wife; we lost our baby. In the book *Every Moment Holy*, the author describes what I couldn't have put into words that day, but upon hearing them later, I immediately made them my own:

*Were we not radiant with anticipation, O Lord,
building forward to the day when we would
finally meet and cradle our sweet child?
Only to be met instead with this cratering
heartache of sudden loss?*⁴

Death was an unwelcome visitor who ripped apart the very idea and hope of what our future would look like, and as quickly as it came, it was gone—leaving us with more questions than answers. I can't help but think the disciples felt something similar the day our Lord Jesus was crucified. In complete hopelessness, they watched as their King was beaten, mocked, and led to his own death.

The night before in Gethsemane, Jesus' humanity and deity were laid bare for us to see as he prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Versions of this prayer have echoed through generations as followers of Jesus wrestle with the searing pain of death and redemptive hope of the Father's will.

There he stood: clothed in purple, crowned with thorns, saluted by soldiers jeering, “Hail, King of the Jews.” As he was raised on the cross, “there was darkness over all the land” (Matthew 27:45).

⁴ Douglas Kaine McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy, Vol. II: Death, Grief, and Hope* (Rabbit Room Press, 2021).

In that holy moment, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). The one who embodied the kingdom and its promises seemed no match for death.

As my wife and I sat in that dim hospital room (on Friday, I might add), we named our son “Tobias”—Hebrew for “God is good.” In that tragic moment, we clung to what the disciples struggled to grasp: The story doesn’t end at the cross. We know the dark day of Jesus’ death is good. In the end, what seemed like defeat was actually God’s greatest victory. Death did not visit our Lord; our Lord paid a visit to death—and robbed it of its sting.

Friday is heavy, burdened with grief and searing loss. Yet, we carry a blessed assurance: Sunday’s coming. The stone will roll. The tomb will be empty. And over every grave, over every shattered future, will ring the Easter cry: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Respond: Have you seen God bring about good from a hard season? Thank him and share that story with a friend. If you’re struggling to see God’s redeeming work, ask him to help you trust that he is working good. Pray, “Man of sorrows and risen Lord, meet us in Friday’s shadows and lead us toward Sunday’s light. Heal what is broken, hold what is grieving, and anchor us in the victory of your cross and emptiness of your tomb. Teach us to trust that even in the dark, you are good.”

Family Discussion: How does Jesus’ example of following God the Father’s will teach us to follow God?

Day 13

All Hail King Jesus

Kelsey Fowler

**“Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus said, ‘You have said so.’ ... And twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ ... And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’ ... ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.’”
- Matthew 27:11, 29, 37, 42**

In Matthew 27, one phrase echoes again and again: “King of the Jews.” It is spoken by Pilate, twisted by soldiers, written on the sign above the cross, and hurled as mockery by religious leaders. No one says it in worship. No one says it in faith. And yet, every time it is spoken, it rings profoundly true.

Matthew 27 overflows with irony, because Jesus reveals himself as the King at the very moment he appears weakest. A crown of thorns replaces gold. A cross becomes his throne. A sign intended to shame unintentionally proclaims a transformative truth: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” What humans intended for mockery, God uses for proclamation.

Even in suffering, Jesus fulfills the picture of a King whose authority flows from obedience and love. The religious leaders mock him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.” But they’ve got it backwards.

He *does* save others by *not* saving himself. Jesus inaugurates his reign not by coming down from the cross but by staying on it.

Scripture affirms that his humiliation is not the end of the story: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). The King of the Jews is also the King of all creation. His crown of thorns gives way to eternal glory.

Yet, Matthew 27 confronts us with a deeper question: What will we do with this King? Some mocked him. Some feared him. Some tried to wash their hands of him.

Jesus is King whether we acknowledge him or not, and he invites us to respond willingly, not sarcastically, passively, or from a distance.

Where have you treated Jesus like a title rather than a ruler? Where have you admired him but resisted his authority?

Today, choose to move from mockery to worship, from observation to surrender. The sign above the cross still stands as an invitation: “This is Jesus—the King.”

Respond: Pray, *“Jesus, you are King. Not just in name but in my life. I lay down my control and receive your rule.”* Reach out to a nonbelieving friend and offer the invitation of the cross to them—to believe in Jesus—and invite them to come to church with you tomorrow. Listen to “Consider the Cross” by Summit Worship, and remember.

Family Discussion: Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?

Day 14

The Three Oldest Resurrection Realities

Chris Pappalardo

“So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.” - Matthew 28:8–9

Jesus, the so-called king, was dead. His disciples had scattered. Most of them, anyway: On Sunday morning, around dawn, two brave women made the lonely trek to the graveyard. They intended to give Jesus a small shred of dignity, anointing his buried body.

What they found instead was an empty tomb, a pair of unconscious guards, and an angel as bright as the sun. “But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid’ ... [Jesus] has risen, as he said” (Matthew 28:5–6). Hurrying away, they carried with them three surprising realities—and those of us who follow Jesus carry the same three realities with us to this day.

First: fear. It may seem strange that these women were afraid. Their nightmare had ended; Jesus was alive! Why, then, the fear? I suspect they feared what any of us would: *Is this really true? What does this mean for us now? What happens next?* The empty tomb was good news, yes. But their future was still filled with uncertainty. Not unlike us. We have the good news of the gospel, but we have no accompanying guarantee of a pain-free, easy life. Like these women, we wonder—often with fear—what leaving everything to follow Jesus will cost us.

Second: great joy. To their credit, the women left the tomb believing the message about Jesus’ resurrection. They may have been afraid, but they were also filled with joy. *Great joy*, in fact. The last time we saw this phrase was when the wise men came to worship the newborn King Jesus (Matthew 2:10). Now, rushing through a garden of graves, the women knew what the wise men didn’t—that this King was greater than death.

Third: the resurrected Jesus. I can almost picture the scene of these two women bumping into Jesus. Their fear and joy, intermingled, are both swallowed up in a moment of worship. Because

here he is, *alive*. Preparing to reign forever over a new kind of kingdom—one with no more sadness and no more death. A kingdom where sins can be forever forgiven. A kingdom where women and men of every nation are invited to sit at the table (cf. Matthew 28:18–20). A kingdom where God takes all the wrong and makes it right, takes all the dark and makes it light.

This Easter, we repent and proclaim the good news of God’s eternal kingdom of life and light.

Respond: Of the three realities these women experienced—fear, great joy, Jesus’ presence—which one resonates most with you? Why? Share with your friends or family how you are responding to the resurrection this Easter.

Family Discussion: Why is Jesus coming back from the dead just as important as him dying?

Day 15

Well, It's Monday Again

Lauren Thompson

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” - Philippians 1:6

As a kid, I knew that Easter was about Jesus. We would sing Easter songs and be excited he had risen. Extra things like Easter egg hunts, (plastic) grass-filled baskets, family meals, and the perk of having Friday off school made it even more fun. But then Monday would come, and it was back to normal life—school, chores, homework, etc.—and the only thing my friends and I would talk about was what we got in our Easter baskets.

Even as an adult, I've felt this creep in—celebrating and being so excited to invite friends or family to church for Easter, hoping they would come and hear the gospel. But then Monday would dawn, and it was back to the grind of daily living. The focus on sharing the gospel with friends shifts to the back burner, while normal life slides to the front. There have also been Easters when the friend didn't come and nothing changed. The day after felt heavy with the world's brokenness.

Well, it's Monday again. So how can we take the joy, hope, and power of knowing Jesus is the risen King and let it permeate our day-to-day lives after Easter Sunday, when life gets in the way and there is still hurting in the world around us?

Remembering Philippians 1:6 is a good start. Paul reminds the Philippians and us that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do good work in and through us. The church at Philippi was challenged by the Roman culture around them, and they, like Paul, experienced suffering. But God was working in them. He's still working in us, and he won't stop. We can look forward to the day when we will rejoice together in heaven and see our King Jesus on his throne (Revelation 21).

We can continue to celebrate and be encouraged every day by what Easter means in our lives.

Whether you just started to believe in Jesus or have been walking with him for many years, be encouraged that the joy, hope, and power of Easter Sunday is not just for Sunday, but flows through to Monday and all our days because the Lord Jesus is still with us. We can trust that God is working in our lives for our good and his glory.

Respond: Take a couple of minutes today to write down some areas in which you would like to see the Lord work in your life. This could be friends or family members you would like to see come to saving faith, a sin struggle you repented of over the Easter season, or some type of suffering/season of suffering you are experiencing.

Then, take a few minutes to pray over what you have written, and pray the following over each:

“Lord, you are my joy, and Jesus, you are my King. I pray over _____, that you would show me how you are working good over this in my life.”

Family Discussion: How is Jesus doing work *in us* different from us doing work *for him*?

Day 16

Riches to Rags

Emily Ruble

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” - Philippians 2:8–11

All the catchy songs, shiny costumes, and dynamic choreography of *The Greatest Showman* decorate the familiar frame of a rags-to-riches story. Opening scenes of the movie show Phineas, a little boy from a poor tailor’s family with a million dreams of living a prestigious life. From his creative and entrepreneurial spirit sprouts a life of showmanship, elevating him to high society. Stories like Phineas’ capture our attention and ignite our aspirations—watching someone with so little reach higher than they could imagine.

The Easter story, though, flips that paradigm upside down. Instead of rags-to-riches, the gospel is a riches-to-rags-to-riches story. God is the creator and sustainer of all life. He is the King of the universe, and everything belongs to him (cf. Psalm 50:10). All that we have and all that we are is because of him.

But we have not treated him as he deserves. Each of us has committed cosmic treason by denying and defying God’s kingship. As rebels, we face a dismal fate: death. But in his perfect and patient love for us, God “did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).

Our King made himself a servant; our God, who is mighty, made himself weak; our Lord, who is rich, made himself poor—all for our sake. Though Jesus was brought down into the grave, he was raised up in victory. He left his rags behind in the empty tomb. Now, he reigns in heaven, robed in splendor and crowned as King.

Christ's story now redefines ours. When all we could offer were sin-stained rags, he clothed himself in our filth to give us God's riches. Not only does he wash us clean, but he "raise[s] us up with him and seat[s] us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). We are the rebels, now made children and heirs.

In Christ, each one of us has a rags-to-riches story that is worth sharing.

Respond: Listen to the song "High and Lowly" by Bethany Barnard, and consider how Jesus humbled himself in order to save us. How is God leading you to lay down any entitlement or comfort in order to serve others and share your story? Share with a Christian friend!

Family Discussion: Let's praise God today. What is awesome about God?

Day 17

Loss Is Gain

Hannah Godat

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” - Philippians 3:8–11

By worldly standards, Paul had a myriad of reasons to boast in himself. He was super smart, he knew (and wrote some of) the Bible, he was top shelf at following the Law. But Paul makes it clear to the Philippians that he has no confidence in his flesh, but in Christ alone. His status, his knowledge, his “good works” were not enough to make him righteous. Only faith in the finished work of Christ could make him right with God.

So he considered every other gain as “rubbish” (literally, a pile of poop) because all he wanted and needed was Jesus.

By worldly standards, Paul also had many reasons to grumble because of his many sufferings while laboring for the kingdom of God. But instead of hardening his heart with bitterness, Paul says that he “suffered the loss of all things ... in order that [he] may gain Christ.” Paul knew that sharing in Jesus’ sufferings would never outweigh sharing in Jesus’ resurrection. In God’s wisdom, we enter into the resurrection power *through* our suffering, not in spite of it.

Paul was able to endure many hardships because he placed his hope in his Savior King, who promised a glorious eternity in his fellowship. He didn’t put the weight of his well-being on his present circumstances but lifted his eyes to behold Christ, leaning everything on him.

Praise God that we don't have to earn our own righteousness and that we have a confidence that is a "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6:19). Regardless of what you have done (or haven't done), if your faith is in Christ, then your future hope is certain, and it is beautiful.

Jesus has risen, and he will come back to bring us home with him. So while we are still on this earth, and even as we suffer, we can press on, filled with hope, joy, and peace!

Respond: Where are you tempted to put your confidence in the flesh? What other "gain" are you putting your hope in? Confess this to the Lord, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you rely on him alone for your righteousness and your hope. Share your confession with a trusted friend who can encourage you in Christ. Listen to "Exalted One" by Summit Worship as a way to behold Christ today.

Family Discussion: How can comparing something great to Jesus make that great thing seem like garbage?

Day 18

The God of Pure Joy

Denise Kyeremeh

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” - Philippians 4:4

Even after trusting in Christ’s death on the cross for our salvation and rejoicing in his resurrection and triumph over death, the hardships of life can still mar us. Our current circumstances like paying the mortgage, taking care of aging parents, feeling the pressure to make good grades, or simply watching the nightly news can feel more potent than that ancient, empty tomb.

Joy can feel difficult to muster in response to Paul’s charge here: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” Does Paul not know the struggle of waking up exhausted and filled with dread, only to go to bed covered with fear and anxiety? He does. Paul was well acquainted with being “brought low,” facing hunger, and being in need (Philippians 4:12). The secret Paul learned in order to rejoice in the Lord regardless of circumstance was that joy looked for him first.

Zephaniah 3:17 says, “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” We do not need to muster up joy in our own strength; we only need to see the joy that God has for us and respond to it. He is rejoicing with gladness in his heart. Our sin and wounds can sometimes cloud our view of how God sees us, but the Holy Scriptures are clear: God has joy in us. He delights in all our features and quirks. God is eagerly awaiting the day when “the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Revelation 21:3).

God loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son to take our sin and reconcile the world back to himself. The Father did everything necessary to be close to us again, even if it meant sending his Son to die on a rugged cross. Our Savior did not hesitate. We were the joy set before him, the reason he endured the cross and despised the shame. When we look at him, we can run this grueling race with endurance. We can cast aside the weights holding us down and the sin

entrapping us (Hebrews 12:1–2). We can dance, run, leap, and sing with joy because even if we have nothing else, we have the endless love of God chasing us down.

Sometimes, the hardest part of rejoicing is letting go of the pain we hold so tightly. You can trust that your Savior holds those hurts and worries for you. You are not alone or forgotten. See him rejoicing over you, and rejoice.

Respond: Get into a posture of gratitude, whether on your knees, standing with your hands lifted to heaven, or laying flat, and tell the Lord you receive his love and his joy. Thank the Lord for every good gift he has given you. Lift up praise and thanksgiving to Jesus for everything he has done. Tell a friend or your small group how God has worked through this Easter devotional over the last few weeks!

Family Discussion: What can we celebrate that God has done in our family or for us?