

This is the first quarter of a plan to read the entire New Testament in one year. One Gospel is included in each quarter. Weekends can be used to reflect on or memorize a key verse. Notes are also included to assist with understanding.

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| 1/3/2022 | MATTHEW 1 | <p>This year we are going to be reading one chapter per day out of the New Testament. We will be reading one of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) in each quarter along with some books of the New Testament that are related to that Gospel. Thank you for your participation in this reading plan!</p> <p>The Old Testament was written before Jesus' birth, and the New Testament was written after his birth. Matthew is one of the Gospels, which tells the story of Jesus' ministry on earth. It was written with a Jewish audience in mind. When Christianity got started, all of Jesus' followers were Jews. Matthew quotes frequently from the Old Testament, which is the Bible with which the Jews were familiar. Matthew was one of Jesus' disciples; so much of the book is relating events he actually witnessed.</p> <p>Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus. The Jews would have known that their Savior (Messiah) had to be a descendant of David. Matthew proves that he was. He gives details of events leading up to Jesus' birth that also prove God's involvement and that his birth was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.</p> <p>Imagine how hard this was for Mary and Joseph. They lived in a small town within a culture that would have strongly condemned a non-married pregnant woman. Joseph must have been crushed to discover his fiancé was pregnant and know he was not the father. Having done nothing wrong, they must have been the center of town gossip. God's plan isn't always easy, but it is what is best! We need to do what God tells us, regardless of the inconvenience.</p> |
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| 1/4/2022 | MATTHEW 2 | <p>As the story of Jesus' birth continues, we are introduced to magi, or wise men, who seek out the place of Jesus' birth using a star in the sky. Little is known about these men. They unknowingly cause Herod the Great to become angry and kill all the male babies in Bethlehem. Historians confirm that Herod was a very insecure ruler who murdered those he perceived to be a threat, including family members. While giving these details of Jesus' early childhood, Matthew points out that these events also fulfill Old Testament prophecies. To the typical Jew Matthew is writing to, Jesus' humble beginnings would not fit with him being the Savior of humanity. Proving that all of this was intended by God was very important.</p> <p>At times, things may feel out of control: like when there is a tragic accident, the loss of a job or the breakup of a relationship. However, God has a plan, even when things seem dark. We need to continue to trust even when we can't see how the current situation can have a positive outcome. The grief is still real, as it was for the parents who lost their sons, but God will be the ultimate victor.</p> |
| 1/5/2022 | MATTHEW 3 | <p>John the Baptist is challenging his fellow Jews to take a serious look at their sin. Jews typically behaved much better than their non-Jewish neighbors, so they probably thought they were doing pretty well. John lets them know God's kingdom is coming, and the half-hearted attempts at living life like they should were not going to be enough. They needed to be cleansed from sin in a way only God could provide. Even though Jesus had no sin that required repentance or cleansing, he still wanted to be baptized to show that cleansing from God was necessary to achieve righteousness from God's perspective.</p> <p>Do you rely on your own good behavior to achieve righteousness or the cleansing that comes from trusting in Jesus? If you are trusting in Jesus, have you been baptized to demonstrate that to others?</p> |

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| 1/6/2022 | MATTHEW 4 | <p>Jesus is tempted three times by the devil. The temptations provide easy ways to accomplish some positive outcomes: satisfying hunger, proving that God keeps his promises and giving Jesus control over the entire earth. The results would have been good, but the methods of getting there would have been wrong. In each situation, Jesus resists the temptation by quoting from the Bible. He then begins his ministry in the area around the Sea of Galilee.</p> <p>Things that tempt us are usually shortcuts to a seemingly positive outcome: stealing so I can have what I want without working too hard; lying so I don't have to suffer the consequences I deserve; gossiping so I can make myself look better than other people. The way to overcome these temptations is to know and obey God's desires, not by pursuing shortcuts to an easier outcome.</p> |
| 1/7/2022 | MATTHEW 5 | <p>This chapter begins the longest of Jesus' teachings recorded in the Bible. The standard of righteousness being taught seems unattainable! In fact, Jesus says that people need to be more righteous than a Pharisee. The Pharisees were people who tried to keep all of the rules in the Old Testament, or at least look like they did. There were 613 laws in the Old Testament, but they even kept laws they made up themselves just to make sure they didn't accidentally break one of God's laws. To everyone but Jesus they looked like very good people. When Jesus said you had to be better than a Pharisee to enter God's kingdom, that would have been disheartening news! Jesus points out that sin can just be thinking something that's wrong and isn't limited to just <i>doing</i> wrong things.</p> <p>Sometimes people don't think they need Jesus. They think they are good enough on their own. Jesus makes it clear that we cannot be good enough to enter his kingdom. We need forgiveness.</p> |
| 1/8/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 1/9/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 1/10/2022 | MATTHEW 6 | <p>Jesus continues to emphasize who people are on the inside over what they appear to be. Their righteousness should be between them and God. That's a way people can invest in eternity rather than life on earth. He also gives us his famous model for prayer.</p> <p>We all tend to behave better when someone is watching. It would be great if we could be so motivated to please God that we do the right thing even when no one knows.</p> |

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| 1/11/2022 | MATTHEW 7 | <p>Here Jesus ends the teaching he started in chapter 5. Judging the behavior of others is a way people can appear righteous even when they aren't. Jesus says the path to God's kingdom is a narrow one. It isn't by trying to impress everyone with how righteous we are; it's through the forgiveness that is found in Jesus. This way is hard to find because it is the only way. We naturally pursue appearing righteous, judging others, and trying to have a relationship with God in our own way. Jesus teaches against all of that. He wants us to be righteous on the inside, accept and forgive others, and come to him in his way.</p> |
| 1/12/2022 | MATTHEW 8 | <p>After having told us about Jesus' teaching, Matthew tells about a number of miracles Jesus performed. The miracles provide proof that Jesus truly is the Messiah for whom the Jews have been looking. He demonstrates power over disease, a storm and demons. At times Jesus uses only his spoken words, just as God had done in creation.</p> <p>Sometimes people view those who lived in Jesus' day as gullible. They think they only believed in Jesus because they were too uneducated to see that he was tricking them. If this were the case, why was Matthew so careful to present proof of who Jesus is? He tells of powerful teaching and miracles and shows how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Those who believed in Jesus weren't tricked into believing; they were convinced by clear evidence that Jesus was sent to them by God. We have proof today too! People who follow the teachings of a poor man who lived 2000 years ago are changed, sometimes in miraculous ways.</p> |
| 1/13/2022 | MATTHEW 9 | <p>Jesus asks an interesting question about whether it is easier to say "Get up and walk" or "Your sins are forgiven". Forgiving someone's sin is something only God can do, but healing someone can be immediately seen. Jesus does both. He also forgives Matthew, a tax-collector, by asking the man to follow him. At the time, tax-collectors were considered to be the worst kinds of sinners. So Jesus continues to demonstrate his power to perform miracles, but adds the authority to forgive sin as well.</p> <p>Although we would all like to witness a miracle like one of the healings we read of here, Jesus' greatest miracle is the forgiveness of our sin. A healing only makes life better until we die; forgiveness lasts for eternity.</p> |
| 1/14/2022 | MATTHEW 10 | <p>Jesus sends out his disciples with the authority to heal and cast out demons. His instructions required complete reliance on God, not on themselves.</p> <p>We prefer relying on ourselves. Relying on anyone else, including God, somehow seems weak. But when compared to God, we are weak. There is nothing better for us to rely on than God.</p> |

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| 1/15/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 1/16/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 1/17/2022 | MATTHEW 11 | <p>Even John the Baptist struggles with the fact that Jesus isn't acting the way he expected the Messiah to act, but Jesus reminds him of his miracles. Jesus denounces some towns on what may seem like a strange basis. He gives an example of towns that were notorious for evil, like Tyre and Sidon, and says they will fare better on judgment day than Jewish towns that have rejected Jesus. From God's perspective, it's not the ones who do the most evil that are the worst off; it's the ones who reject God's forgiveness even though they should know better.</p> <p>We need to view things as God does. Our highest priority should be helping people who have not received God's forgiveness receive it, not trying to turn back a tide of evil.</p> |
| 1/18/2022 | MATTHEW 12 | <p>The Pharisees were rule-followers. One of their favorite rules stated that people could not work on the Sabbath (Saturday). They had added rules on top of what God required just to make sure they didn't accidentally work on the Sabbath. For example, you had a maximum number of steps allowed to be taken. Counting my steps all day sounds like work to me. Since Jesus and his followers were breaking one of these rules, the Pharisees were convinced that Jesus was God's enemy. They explained Jesus' miracles as having been done in Satan's power. Jesus strongly condemns this kind of unbelief. If a person is going to reject a clear demonstration of God's power and attribute it to Satan, there is no hope.</p> <p>There are those today who are blinded by their strongly held beliefs which prevent them from seeing the power of God. Overcoming this kind of unbelief is not easy.</p> |
| 1/19/2022 | MATTHEW 13 | <p>Jesus often taught in parables. A parable is a short story of something ordinary that illustrates something spiritual. A couple of them are explained, but others require more thought to understand. The story of the farmer shows that some people are more open to trusting Jesus than others. It's our job to spread the Word, but the result depends on the receiver. Jesus also uses illustrations of growth. The Jews were expecting a conquering Messiah, one who would arrive and turn things around in a single act of power. Jesus is letting them know God's plan is different and involves a slower process of reproduction and growth over time.</p> <p>As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are part of that growth process. We tell others of Jesus so they can become citizens as well.</p> |

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| 1/20/2022 | MATTHEW 14 | <p>The Herod talked about here is the son of Herod who killed the boys in chapter 2. Herod convinced Herodius to divorce his brother, Philip, and marry him instead. John had criticized them for doing this and was put in prison. Herodius gets her revenge by manipulating Herod into beheading John. Herod must have had a guilty conscience because, when he hears about Jesus, he thinks John the Baptist has come back to life. Jesus performed a couple of amazing miracles by feeding 5,000 people with a small lunch and by walking on water. Peter had an amazing experience despite his wavering faith. He has enough faith to get out of the boat, but not enough to stay on top of the water.</p> <p>We see a couple of examples of responses to Jesus' miracles. Herod was aware of Jesus' miracles, but does nothing to become one of his followers. Herod seems to react more in fear. Peter's response is to be a follower, but a somewhat unreliable one. Obviously, we are better off being an unreliable follower than one who rejects Jesus altogether. Peter's faith, like ours, will have a chance to grow as he has more experiences with Jesus.</p> |
| 1/21/2022 | MATTHEW 15 | <p>The Pharisees continue with their rule-following, and Jesus opposes them strongly. The Pharisees are concerned with the appearance of goodness, while Jesus is concerned with the heart. He makes an observation that is kind of gross. People put good things into their bodies, but what comes out is nasty. It is the same with behavior; people have a tendency to do wrong things even when they have been well-taught, like the Pharisees. He also has an interesting interaction with a woman who is not Jewish. She believes in Jesus and wants her daughter to be released from demon possession. Jesus resists, but she persists. That's quite a contrast to the Pharisees! The Pharisees knew the Bible well, but missed Jesus. The non-Jewish woman had not been taught the Bible, but believed in him.</p> <p>Our backgrounds don't matter; it's what we do with Jesus! Some people have all the advantages and still don't find the truth; some don't have any advantage and find it. It seems more likely that those who have been taught the truth would find it, but it doesn't always work that way.</p> |
| 1/22/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 1/23/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |

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| 1/24/2022 | MATTHEW 16 | <p>After all the miracles Jesus has done, the Pharisees and Sadducees ask for a miracle to prove that Jesus is from God. The Sadducees were a rival group of the Pharisees, but this time they are teaming up to oppose Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples they will see the sign of Jonah. Jesus had said this once before in chapter 12 with more explanation there. The story of Jonah was told in the Old Testament. He had been thrown off a ship and swallowed by a fish. After three days, the fish spit him out on the shoreline. Jesus is predicting he will be dead for three days and rise from the dead. We won't see this till later, but most Pharisees and Sadducees will reject that sign too. Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is. Peter correctly answers that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah. Jesus then begins to move toward his death.</p> <p>Perhaps you have talked with someone who has said that if they could witness one of those miracles, like the ones described in the Bible, they would believe in Jesus. The people who did see those miracles didn't all believe in Jesus, so more miracles aren't the answer. We can believe in God from what we can see in creation and changed lives, but it still takes faith to trust in a God we cannot see.</p> |
| 1/25/2022 | MATTHEW 17 | <p>Jesus displays his heavenly glory in a direct way by appearing with Moses and Elijah. This must have been a tremendous faith-building time for Peter, James, and John! Jesus cast out a demon that the disciples had not been able to cast out. This shows the incompleteness of their faith. The chapter ends with an amusing story of paying taxes. Being the Son of God, Jesus was exempt from the tax for God's Temple, but once Peter had made the commitment, it was more important for Jesus to keep the commitment than to claim his right to not pay.</p> <p>The disciples had heard more of Jesus' teaching and seen more of his miracles than anybody, but they still misunderstood who he was at times. That means there is hope for us! We might get our relationship with Jesus wrong, but we can still have an impact and participate in the amazing work God is doing!</p> |

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| 1/26/2022 | MATTHEW 18 | <p>It's hard to imagine, after everything the disciples have seen of Jesus, they would argue over who is greatest! They are becoming like Pharisees, but Jesus wants them to become like children. Jesus is concerned for everyone, especially those in need of rescue. Sometimes even our fellow Christians are in need of rescue. He provides a model of how we can relate to those who have sinned against us. It is all motivated by a desire to see the relationship restored. It takes a great deal of humility to want to restore a relationship that has been broken by the other person's wrongdoing. Continual forgiveness of others, as we have been forgiven by God, is required. Everyone probably struggles with pride. Even if we don't say it, we want to have some sort of advantage over those around us. We also want to see others punished for the wrongs they have done to us. If I want to be greater than you and you want to be greater than me, we will always be dissatisfied. If I want you to be punished for your sin and mine to be overlooked, and you want it the other way around, things will never turn out. But practicing humility and forgiveness works for everyone.</p> |
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| 1/27/2022 | MATTHEW 19 | <p>This chapter contains two controversial teachings, controversial both then and now. The first was on the subject of divorce. Moses had said in Deuteronomy 24 that a man could divorce his wife if he discovered some “indecency” in her. Some Jewish teachers, called rabbis, said that it meant a divorce could happen for any reason for which a man wanted to divorce his wife and others said it could only happen if she committed adultery. The question was asked to trick Jesus into taking sides. Regardless of his answer, one of the groups was going to be upset. Jesus did take sides and say divorce could only happen in the case of adultery and even then only as a concession.</p> <p>The second seems strange to us but would have been more controversial then. Jesus tells a rich man to stop relying on his wealth and goes on to say that it is difficult for a rich person to enter heaven. The common teaching in that day was that God blessed good people with wealth and punished bad people with poverty. That idea caused rich people to think they had all the advantages in this life and eternity. Jesus is letting them know that those who rely on their possessions to prove their relationship with God are mistaken.</p> <p>Jesus’ teaching on divorce is that it cannot take place without causing damage. God designed marriage to be permanent. It doesn’t always turn out that way, but it was the original plan of the One who created it. For those who are married, our marriages should be considered a permanent commitment. We should take all possible steps to avoid divorce. We also need to avoid relying on anything other than Jesus for our relationship with God. For the man in this story, it was wealth. For others, it could be being good, going to church, staying married or being generous. Those things are good, but Jesus is the only way!</p> |
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| 1/28/2022 | MATTHEW 20 | <p>The stories in this chapter emphasize selfish ambition even when it comes to what we receive from God. The first is a parable. Jesus tells of people who receive equal wages even though some worked longer than others. It's a picture of the fact that those who trust Jesus go to heaven even though some have followed Jesus all their lives and some only trust him at the end of their lives. The mother of James and John thinks they deserve a special place in heaven, but Jesus says it's the least of his followers who receive that honor. The other disciples are angry at the request, so their desire for special treatment was not unique to James and John.</p> <p>No one deserves heaven, yet somehow people can come to a place where they think they deserve more of heaven than someone else. God lavishes forgiveness and grace on us, and then we want more. It would be like me giving a beautiful, new home to a homeless person and having him complain that it doesn't have a hot-tub. God must find our complaining pretty ungrateful, but still he loves us!</p> |
| 1/29/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 1/30/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 1/31/2022 | MATTHEW 21 | <p>Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey amidst the praises of the people, but things quickly change as Jesus challenges current religious practices. He angrily removes people from the Temple who are taking financial advantage of those who are coming to worship God. Jesus recognizes that most Jews have decided to reject him, so he begins to illustrate the fact that God will reject the Jews for their unbelief. The fig tree had leaves on it, but should have also had fruit on it. The Jews were like the tree: they appeared to be healthy, but on closer inspection they were not. The story of the servants who kill the master's son predicts that Jesus will be killed by those who should have served him. Jesus is making it clear that those who have rejected him will be rejected. The Jewish rejection of Jesus is demonstrated by the Jewish leaders' challenge of Jesus. They ask from where his authority is coming. Jesus' authority had been affirmed by John the Baptist, and the leaders wanted to appear to be in support of John, but they had actually rejected his message. These people wanted the appearance of being loyal followers of God but were rejecting him.</p> <p>The seriousness of rejecting Jesus cannot be overestimated. Like the Jews at that time, if we reject him, we cannot bear fruit by accomplishing things for him and cannot enjoy the joy of being with him for eternity.</p> |

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| 2/1/2022 | MATTHEW 22 | <p>Continuing on from chapter 21, Jesus illustrates the consequences of the Jews rejecting Jesus. The guests that reject the initial invitation are the Jews. Burning their city predicts the Roman destruction of Jerusalem about 40 years later. The invitation is then extended to less noble guests, who are non-Jews. The Jews called the non-Jews Gentiles. However, even Gentiles can't attend the feast as they are; they need to be clothed in the righteousness Jesus offers them through the forgiveness of their sin.</p> <p>Jesus is then challenged on a number of subjects that are designed to make him take sides on controversial subjects. Nobody likes to pay taxes, so supporting taxes would make him unpopular with the people. Speaking against taxes could get him arrested for sedition. The Pharisees believed in the afterlife, and the Sadducees did not. The Sadducees asked a question they felt made the idea of an afterlife look ridiculous. Jesus confirmed that there is an afterlife using an argument of which the Pharisees had never thought. Seeing that Jesus had sided with Pharisees, they asked him a question about the greatest commandment. They would have approved of his answer. However, he also asked a question they could not answer. The Pharisees had anticipated the arrival of a Messiah, but they did not expect him to be God. Jesus asked a question about how they interpreted Psalm 110. They couldn't answer it because it didn't match with their understanding of who the Messiah was to be. Jesus is letting them know he is the Messiah and is God.</p> <p>Gentiles who have trusted Jesus should be very thankful for this teaching from Jesus. His forgiveness is offered to all, regardless of background! The Pharisees' continuing rejection of Jesus is amazing. These people were experts in the Old Testament, yet this seemingly uneducated tradesman is making arguments they never thought of and cannot refute. Despite Jesus' ability to do miracles and clearly superior knowledge of God and his Word, they cannot see that he is who he says he is.</p> |
| 2/2/2022 | MATTHEW 23 | <p>Jesus warns his disciples and the crowd about the Pharisees. They look good on the outside, but are actually hypocrites. It would be difficult to find Jesus condemning anyone more harshly than this. The problem is that they know the most about the Bible, but use their knowledge for their own gain rather than to honor God.</p> <p>This kind of condemnation is hard to hear. The Pharisees probably thought they were doing the right thing, but were blinded by their own pride. In what ways could we be trying to do the right things and not know we are looking at things incorrectly? We would all be wise to pray and ask God to let us know if we are blind to some wrong attitude.</p> |

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| 2/3/2022 | MATTHEW 24 | <p>The Temple in Jerusalem during Jesus' life was an amazing structure. The Jews, Jesus' disciples included, were very proud they had such an impressive house of worship. Jesus lets his disciples know that it will be completely destroyed. The prophecy is fulfilled in 70 AD when the Romans invade to put down a rebellion. Jesus also describes what things are going to be like when he returns. The natural disasters, persecution, conflict and false religious leaders could describe any generation since Jesus' death, but just before Jesus' return, the events will threaten all human life (verse 22).</p> <p>Although we should do all we can to bring people to Christ and spread justice to all people, the ultimate solution is Christ's return. Jesus tells us we should always be prepared for his return. We don't want to be caught not doing what he would want us to do.</p> |
| 2/4/2022 | MATTHEW 25 | <p>Jesus gives three parables to illustrate the need to be ready for his return and the final judgment. The story of the bridesmaids and the oil illustrates being ready at any time, while also realizing that it could be a long time before Jesus returns. The story of the money being left in the hands of the servants tells us we need to be working hard to multiply what God has given us to accomplish more of his work. The story of the sheep and goats teaches that you can tell those who are genuinely following Jesus by how they treat the oppressed. In the final judgment, Jesus will recognize his followers by their behavior. We don't know if Jesus will come back soon or not for another 1,000 years. Jesus' advice to those waiting for his return 2,000 years ago is the same for us: be prepared at any time, but be prepared to wait. Make sure you are using what you have been given to do God's work, and let your belief in Jesus show in how you treat others.</p> |
| 2/5/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 2/6/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 2/7/2022 | MATTHEW 26 | <p>Today we read of the final events before Jesus' death. None of this takes him by surprise; it is all part of God's plan. The religious leaders continue their rejection, and Jesus' closest followers distance themselves from him. Jesus is about to demonstrate his great love for everyone, but he does it alone, rejected or avoided by even his closest followers.</p> <p>The story of the entire Bible is humanity's rejection of God and God's continual love for humanity. That theme is no better illustrated than in the death of Jesus and the events surrounding it. Each time we do something that is contrary to God's desire, we demonstrate our rejection of him and Christ's death covers it.</p> |

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| 2/8/2022 | MATTHEW 27 | <p>Jesus is put on trial multiple times. The Jewish leaders were not permitted to execute people; it was only Roman authorities who had that power. Pilate correctly determines that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death, but bows to pressure from the people. Jesus' crucifixion also involves being mocked and beaten. Upon Jesus' death, the curtain in the Temple is torn. This signifies that now that Jesus had died for the sins of everyone, the people no longer needed to make sacrifices at the Temple. Jesus is then buried. Under normal circumstances, this would be the end of the story. Jesus' disciples must have been heart-broken and feeling very foolish for having followed someone whom they thought would take over the world.</p> <p>Jesus died for you and me. He died so we would not need to pay for our own sin. He was mocked so we could experience glory. He was considered a criminal so we could be considered righteous. He died alone so we could have a relationship with God. Our gratitude should be boundless!</p> |
| 2/9/2022 | MATTHEW 28 | <p>Just as Jesus said he would, he rises from the dead. Despite this overwhelming evidence of God's power, the Jewish leaders continue to reject him. They are so committed to their opposition of Jesus they encourage the guards to lie. Jesus tells his disciples their job is to encourage both Jews and non-Jews to trust and follow him.</p> <p>There is nothing more important we can do than help others trust Jesus. It's easy to become distracted by making a living or doing other good things, but the reason Jesus has left us here on earth is to lead others to him.</p> |

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| 2/10/2022 | JAMES 1 | <p>Like Matthew, the Book of James was intended for a Jewish audience, as seen in verse 1. James is Jesus' half-brother. He had initially rejected Jesus (Mark 3:31-35), but probably trusted him after his resurrection (Acts 15:13). James was one of, if not the first book of the New Testament written. James is giving very practical advice for how people's lives should match what they believe about Jesus. Having grown up in the same house as Jesus, he would have lots of insight into what faith looks like in everyday life.</p> <p>Just as Jesus had been arrested and crucified, so the Jews who had trusted Jesus were also being persecuted. Understandably, they couldn't figure out why God was letting this happen. James puts a strange twist on difficulties by saying we should find joy in them, because they make us strong. The best test of our faith comes in the bad times, not the good. Jesus had taught that it was hard for rich people to get to heaven, so James also sees poor people as being the ones with all the advantages. They can be stronger in this life due to their struggles and be more likely to have eternal life. It's not that God causes our suffering, but he does use it to make us stronger.</p> <p>James tells us it's not enough to read the Bible; we need to put it into practice. There aren't too many people who are joyful in suffering or like being poor, so there aren't very many who seem to have put this chapter into practice. However, many have grown stronger in their faith in difficult times. The joy probably comes more after the trial has passed and the faith has been strengthened, but with faith, we can believe the trial is for our benefit even in the midst of it.</p> |
| 2/11/2022 | JAMES 2 | <p>James says one way of loving your neighbor as yourself is to not give preference to rich people. He also says something kind of scary by telling us if we violate any part of the law we are guilty of breaking all of it. People like to view certain sins as big and others as not so big. Of course there are bigger consequences for some sins, like prison or damage to your reputation, but God sees us as either sinful or righteous. Finally, he tells us our behavior should be consistent with what we believe. If I truly believe God is in control and loves us unconditionally, I would never want to do anything he doesn't like. If I have no problem with doing wrong things, it calls my faith into question.</p> <p>Not showing preference for rich or powerful people is hard. We want to be viewed favorably by those who can benefit us. It's not so much that we need to think less of rich people, but more of poor people. We benefit from respecting them by pleasing God. It's one of the ways our behavior can be consistent with our faith.</p> |

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| 2/12/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 2/13/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 2/14/2022 | JAMES 3 | <p>A case is made for the importance of controlling the tongue. For teachers, this is especially important because their tongues are very influential. In Genesis 1 we are told that God made humanity in his own likeness. James points out that we cannot praise God and then insult those who are made in God's likeness. James goes on to contrast two kinds of wisdom. There is earthly wisdom, which helps a person take advantage of others, and there is heavenly wisdom, which makes us, and those around us, better. We are challenged to seek heavenly wisdom.</p> <p>When James was writing, words were almost always spoken and only sometimes handwritten. Today we have printed and electronic means of communicating our words. It is so much more important for us to pay attention to the fact that those we talk about and to are created in God's likeness. He loves them, no matter what they do.</p> |
| 2/15/2022 | JAMES 4 | <p>James also blames conflict on our tendency toward selfishness. Selfish desires also lead to asking God for things that aren't good. It's a way Christians end up looking just like non-Christians. People further demonstrate their self-centeredness by assuming God will go along with their plans. People should always recognize that God has the right to intervene. Being self-centered leads to many negative behaviors. When we submit to God, the desires that lead to the behaviors James mentions are overcome.</p> |
| 2/16/2022 | JAMES 5 | <p>Cause and effect are emphasized here. The wealthy are taking advantage of the poor and will eventually suffer for their unjust treatment of others. Those who are suffering are told to be patient because everything will be set right when Jesus returns. Those who sin need to confess. We are to pray for those who are sinning so they don't suffer the consequences of their choices.</p> <p>Enjoying something in the present and ignoring the consequences is a common failing. Our finances, health and relationships with Christ all suffer because we make choices without considering the long-term impact. Our best path is to turn from selfish choices that feel good in the moment and to help others do the same thing.</p> |

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| 2/17/2022 | GALATIANS 1 | <p>After Jesus’ death and resurrection, a man by the name of Paul became a follower of Jesus. He was sent by God to travel around teaching people about Jesus and starting churches outside of Israel. Since those churches were outside of Israel, many of the people in them were not Jewish. Since all of the initial followers of Jesus were Jewish, there was a controversy over whether non-Jews (Gentiles) could become Christians. Galatians is a letter from Paul written to the church he started in Galatia, which is in what we call Turkey today. Paul is writing this letter to argue that people don’t need to become Jews, signified by being circumcised, in order to become followers of Jesus.</p> <p>Paul states very strongly that the people are not supposed to accept any other gospel (good news) than the one he preached. It would be natural for someone who disagreed with Paul to ask, “Why should we take his word for it?” Paul begins by describing how he came to trust in Jesus and how his message was given to him directly by Jesus.</p> <p>Today, we don’t argue about whether people need to become Jews before trusting Jesus, but that doesn’t mean we don’t still want to add things to the gospel. It might be things like: abandon a lifestyle, embrace a belief, join a particular church or go through a ceremony. All of those things may be good things to do, but they aren’t required to trust Jesus. Have you inadvertently wandered into a different gospel?</p> |
| 2/18/2022 | GALATIANS 2 | <p>Paul continues his argument by telling them that the leaders of the church in Jerusalem were fully supportive of his ministry. He had been leading Gentiles to Christ and been welcomed. Specifically, he had arrived in Jerusalem with Titus, who was not a Jew and not circumcised, and he was accepted as a fellow follower of Jesus. Paul even openly criticized Peter for acting like a Jew around Jews and acting like a Gentile around Gentiles. The implication is that Peter recognized his error and corrected it. The difficulty for Jews in accepting Gentiles wasn’t just racism. Jews tried to live according to the Old Testament Law. That means they lived a lifestyle with higher standards than Gentiles. The Jews found many of the behaviors of Gentiles to be disgusting! They couldn’t imagine God could love people like that and give them access to salvation through Jesus.</p> <p>Are there people you are convinced God could not love or accept? Maybe it’s a group of people who behave in ways you find repulsive. Maybe it’s a particular person who has hurt you in some way. God loves everyone! Can you view the people God loves in the same way he does?</p> |
| 2/19/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 2/20/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |

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| 2/21/2022 | GALATIANS 3 | <p>Paul reminds his Jewish readers that Abraham was forgiven on the basis of believing what God told him, not by keeping the Old Testament Law (Genesis 15:6). How could Abraham have kept laws that didn't even exist yet? If a person were to earn righteousness by keeping the law, they would be required to keep all of it all the time. That's 613 rules! Although the law was great at letting people know they needed forgiveness, it never brought about forgiveness. You either depend entirely on the law and be perfect or trust Jesus and let him pay for all the times you have failed to keep the law. Since keeping the law perfectly is impossible, the right choice is obvious. The mixing of trusting Jesus but requiring some extra stuff is tempting. We have received the priceless gift of salvation, and God requires nothing from us but to believe it. When we attempt to earn salvation, we are trying to put a price on something that is priceless.</p> |
| 2/22/2022 | GALATIANS 4 | <p>Paul compares not having Christ with slavery and having Christ with being free. For the Jews, they were like children who were to inherit an estate. As long as they were children, the inheritance is held in trust. In Old Testament times the Jews had the promise that their Messiah was coming, but could not enjoy the full benefits until he actually arrived. For Gentiles, they worshipped false gods and observed feasts and practices that were useless. Neither group should have any reason for returning to slavery. We return to slavery anytime we go back to our old way of life without Christ. It might be a religious ritual or behavior or it could be a sinful behavior. It was the deliverance from sin and slavery that attracted us to Jesus; why go back?</p> |
| 2/23/2022 | GALATIANS 5 | <p>Since Paul is challenging people to not return to the slavery of the law, the obvious question is, how do we live a godly life after we have trusted Jesus? Paul tells us we have the Holy Spirit living in us. When we try to do the right thing on our own, it's slavery. When we rely on the Holy Spirit, he brings freedom. The fruit of the Spirit is not a list of behaviors, but character traits. The Holy Spirit lives within us, changing our character. When our character changes, we naturally do the things the law required. That doesn't mean we should purposely do wrong things and wait for our character to change; that would be returning to the slavery of sin. It's that we willingly submit to letting the Holy Spirit change our character. Working at being righteous is discouraging. The harder we work at it, the more we think about the very thing that is a temptation to us. Relying on the Holy Spirit isn't easy either. We like quick and easy fixes to our problems where we can take some credit for it. Paul recommends the slow process of character change and giving God the credit.</p> |

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| 2/24/2022 | GALATIANS 6 | <p>One of the things that characterizes people who are trying to earn God's favor by following rules is to be proud of their success at keeping rules and critical of people who don't. Paul turns that around and tells the spiritual ones to be humble and gently help those who are failing. He closes out the book with some advice about supporting those who are their teachers, and demonstrates that the letter is actually from him by closing it in his own handwriting. Paul probably had poor eyesight and had someone else write his words down in writing most of the letter.</p> <p>A sad thing about moving forward in our relationship with Jesus is that it can cause us to see more clearly the failings of those around us. Those who have truly been led by the Spirit in their relationship with Jesus react with compassion, like Jesus did. Those who are just following rules react with judgment. We all react the wrong way sometimes, but that should cause us to turn to the Holy Spirit for guidance.</p> |
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| 2/25/2022 | ROMANS 1 | <p>Just like Galatians, Paul wrote Romans as a letter to the church in Rome. Unlike Galatians, Paul had not started this church. Since Paul had not been to Rome, he seems to be concerned that the people in the church have not been taught what they need to know. His motivation for writing the letter appears to be giving the people an introduction to many Christian beliefs. Many see Romans 1:16 & 17 as the theme for the book. Paul says that God's righteousness is demonstrated in his treatment of humanity.</p> <p>Paul begins with an introduction and speaks of his longing to visit the church in Rome. Fortunately for us, Paul had been unable to visit and is writing to them instead. Had he visited Rome earlier, we wouldn't have the opportunity to read Romans. Paul then begins his arguments for the righteousness of God. When God judges those who have not been exposed to the Bible or people who know the Bible, this seems unfair. How could God condemn someone who has never heard the truth? Paul points out that a common experience for everyone is being exposed to creation. God had provided for us in abundant ways, but rather than recognize that there is a loving God out there who did all this, some choose to worship things in creation. The idols many have worshipped in human history look like things God created and ignore the God who created them. As a result of this lack of recognition of God, God allows humanity to pursue deeper and deeper levels of sin. Even though it is obvious to them that they are behaving in ways that are wrong, they still do not turn to God.</p> <p>We don't find too many people worshipping idols today, but that doesn't mean people don't worship creation rather than the Creator. People cross the line of taking care of the earth God has created to caring for the earth because it sustains us. They move from studying science because it reveals the character of our Creator to studying science to prove he doesn't exist. Certainly those who have been exposed to the message of Jesus are more likely to come to him, but everyone has the option of responding to God in positive ways.</p> |
| 2/26/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 2/27/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |

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| 2/28/2022 | ROMANS 2 | <p>Paul gets back to the subject of following rules in this chapter. Any time people use some sort of rule to judge others, they are acknowledging God's right to judge them. The church in Rome was made up of Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) just like the Galatian Church. Although the Jews had many more rules than the Gentiles, and those rules had been handed down by God, the Gentiles had rules too. Even if people are unaware of God's rules, they know there need to be rules and that people who break those rules should suffer a consequence.</p> <p>Paul sees that people want God to be forgiving toward them, but judge those they don't like harshly. The danger of us looking down on someone else for their sin is that we condemn ourselves for our own sin. We would do well to view our own sin and the sins of others as serious rebellion against God that has already been forgiven.</p> |
| 3/1/2022 | ROMANS 3 | <p>Paul argues against an objection to salvation he has probably heard. If our sin causes God to become more righteous by forgiving more sin, is our sin a good thing? Paul outright condemns that kind of thinking. Obviously God is not in favor of sin! He then paints a very negative picture of humanity with various quotes from the Old Testament. Every person who has ever lived is a terrible sinner! God's righteousness is demonstrated in that he makes righteousness available to everyone through the death of his son. All anyone needs to do is believe.</p> <p>If you are trying to earn your way to righteousness, you are making the situation worse. You are acknowledging that God has the right to judge you, but hope he overlooks the ways you fall short. The right answer is to realize your sin and depend on God to forgive you through Jesus' death on the cross.</p> |

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| 3/2/2022 | ROMANS 4 | <p>This chapter is targeted toward the Jews in the church of Rome. As he has already done in Galatians, Paul shows that Abraham was made right with God based on his faith, not the things he did. In Galatians, Paul pointed out that Abraham was considered righteous before the law even existed. Here he points out that it was even before he was circumcised. Neither the law nor circumcision has the power to make a person righteous. If salvation is by faith, it cannot have anything added to it or else it is the result of the thing the person has done. Salvation becomes a form of payment for meeting a requirement. The only requirement is to believe Jesus died for our wrongdoing.</p> <p>Mixing faith and something we do doesn't work. If there is anything required of us, we could then claim to have played a part in our salvation. God has determined that he wants to do all the work and give us salvation as a gift. Think how insulting it would be for you to give someone a gift that has cost you dearly and the receiver offers you a quarter for it. That gives a small insight into how God feels when we attempt to earn his gift of salvation.</p> |
| 3/3/2022 | ROMANS 5 | <p>Paul now tells us the benefits we receive as a result of trusting Jesus. Not only are our sins forgiven, but we have peace with God, assurance of heaven, we can rejoice in suffering, we receive the Holy Spirit and see a demonstration of God's love for us. Jesus and Adam are contrasted. Adam was the first man God created. In Genesis 3, we are told he sinned and introduced sin and, as a result, death, to all humanity. Jesus is the man who is God who overcomes all of the sin of all of humanity with one righteous act.</p> <p>The benefits we receive from salvation are many, and each one is priceless. We can never pay God back for what he has done, but there is nothing he can ask of us that isn't deserving of our unquestioned submission.</p> |
| 3/4/2022 | ROMANS 6 | <p>This chapter and the next two emphasize how we successfully live as followers of Jesus after we have trusted him. As he did in chapter 3, Paul repeats that God's grace should not be used as an excuse to continue sinning. He reminds us that when we trusted Jesus, our old self died and a new one came into being. The old one was the unwilling slave of sin. The new one should be the willing slave of God. Paul cannot understand a person wanting to return to that old way of life.</p> <p>The old way of living can look pretty tempting sometimes. People who live like that sure seem to be having fun. Maybe it's only tempting to sin a little bit. Our former slavery to sin still has a hold on us. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we came to Christ because we recognized how bad our sin was. Why would we go back to what we at one time recognized was self-destructive?</p> |

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| 3/5/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 3/6/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 3/7/2022 | ROMANS 7 | <p>Here we are warned about the wrong way to follow Jesus. If you remember back to Matthew, some of Jesus' biggest opponents were the Pharisees. Paul had been one of those. He believed a relationship with God was earned by following rules. Here he warns followers of Jesus not to go back to that way of thinking. So, in chapter 6, he let us know we are dead to sin, and in chapter 7 he tells us we are dead to rule-following too. The hard thing about rule-following is that it only makes us aware of how bad we are and even causes us to desire the forbidden things even more. We won't be given the right answer until chapter 8.</p> <p>Trying to be a good Christian by following rules is a common mistake. It brings about failure and guilt. In those who do a reasonably good job of following the rules, it brings about pride and judgment of others. Find a Christian who feels defeated in his or her relationship with Jesus and you probably have found someone who is basing their relationship with Jesus on rule-following.</p> |
| 3/8/2022 | ROMANS 8 | <p>When we trust Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. This is the source of victory for the Christian. We live righteously by depending on the Spirit. Many benefits of having the Holy Spirit are listed for us. The chapter ends with promises that cannot be read without a sense of excitement! God loves us and has given us victory through the death of his Son and the sending of his Holy Spirit to live in us.</p> <p>Depending on the Holy Spirit sounds so simple, but we still find it difficult to do. Centering our lives on Jesus and giving control to the Holy Spirit is a moment by moment choice. In this moment are you pursuing sin, rule-following, or dependence on the Holy Spirit?</p> |

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| 3/9/2022 | ROMANS 9 | <p>This is targeted toward the Jewish people in the church of Rome. Jews would have taken great pride in their heritage and assumed they had a special place in God's heart. Paul points out that even within their history, there were close descendants of Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, who were not chosen by God. Abraham's son Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. It was through Jacob the nation of Israel came into existence, not Esau. Jews would have been well aware that Jacob was far from perfect. In some ways Esau seemed to be better behaved. Therefore, if Abraham's grandson could be rejected, how much more so a Jew from many generations later? In verse 32, Paul emphasizes that it is those who did not pursue God by faith who were rejected, regardless of their heritage.</p> <p>There are people with greater advantages when it comes to having a relationship with God. A person raised in a home where Jesus is known and taught clearly has an advantage over a person who has never met a Christian. In Paul's day, it was the Jews who had the advantage. Regardless, it is up to every individual to accept Jesus' payment for his or her sin. You didn't have a choice in what type of home or culture you were raised in, but you do have the choice to trust Jesus or not.</p> |
| 3/10/2022 | ROMANS 10 | <p>Continuing to address the Jewish view, Paul tells them God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles. Anyone who hears the message of Jesus and accepts it is saved. He quotes Moses and Isaiah, who were two of the writers of the Old Testament, as predicting that non-Jews would listen to God's message but that Israel would stubbornly reject it. Paul is seeing these predictions come true as most of the people coming to Jesus at this point are not Jews.</p> <p>When Paul speaks of people needing to hear the message of Jesus and the need for people to take the message to them, he is speaking to those of us who know Jesus. People are far more likely to come to Jesus if we take the message to them. We should take the message to everyone, because God is the God of everyone, and anyone who trusts in Jesus will be saved!</p> |

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| 3/11/2022 | ROMANS 11 | <p>Paul recognizes that, for the most part, the Jews have rejected Jesus as the way to salvation. Given their history of having a relationship with God, they should have been the ones to accept Jesus. Ironically, the ones who should naturally have been part of God's people are broken off and the ones who should not have been, the Gentiles, are grafted in. Paul warns the Gentiles that they need to recognize they are not the natural branches. In other words, there should be no room for anti-Semitism among Christians. He then says that in the future, things will turn around. There is a day coming when Israel will be spiritually revived. Paul closes this section of Romans in praise to God because he has demonstrated the righteousness of God in his dealings with humanity. Who has accepted Jesus and who has rejected him is a mystery. Paul and his fellow Jews had the most reasons to trust Jesus, but it took a miracle for Paul to believe, and most others never did. Gentiles had almost no exposure to God and lived lives that completely ignored God's standards. It seemed obvious they would never come to Christ, but somehow they did. It is never our job to determine who will believe and who will not. We tell people about Jesus and leave the rest to God.</p> |
| 3/12/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 3/13/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 3/14/2022 | ROMANS 12 | <p>Romans transitions from teaching us about the things God has done for us to giving practical instructions for how we should live. It all starts with giving ourselves as living sacrifices and being completely transformed. The idea of a sacrifice refers back to when animals were sacrificed to various gods. Once we have given ourselves as a sacrifice, we are able to humbly operate as a gift to others and to love others in self-sacrificing ways.</p> <p>There is an old saying that the problem with being a living sacrifice is you can still crawl off the altar. We can decide at one point we want to submit everything about ourselves to God and then later take some of the control back. That will be a struggle for everyone while on this earth, but recommitting ourselves to God is something we can do today.</p> |

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| 3/15/2022 | ROMANS 13 | <p>Two subjects are covered here, obedience to government and loving others. We are told that God has appointed governments for our good. There are times when governments go beyond what God has appointed them to do, but when they are punishing wrongdoers, they are God's instruments for helping people to live better lives. Since we are commanded to love others, Paul sees love as a debt we owe everyone. Maybe one of the hardest instructions here is to respect those in authority. Freedom of speech gives people the right to express their views, but loving others requires us do so respectfully, even when we strongly disagree.</p> |
| 3/16/2022 | ROMANS 14 | <p>The eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols was a controversial subject for the church in Rome. For some, it was a great way to save money on meat. The idol meant nothing to these people, so eating the leftover meat was not a problem for them. For others, maybe former idol worshipers, the meat was associated with something of which they were afraid. They thought they were more holy because they avoided something they considered evil. Paul says they were the weaker ones because they were still afraid of powerless idols. The stronger ones were told to treat the weaker ones fears in a loving and understanding way.</p> <p>We have different controversies today, but the principles are the same. We want to claim our right to do as we please, but we need to pause and ask what the loving thing to do is.</p> |
| 3/17/2022 | ROMANS 15 | <p>Paul finishes out his topic of how the spiritually strong and weak should interact. He then talks about his plan for ministry moving forward. A common thread between the two is Paul's focus on the most important things, which are loving others and bringing people to Jesus. He will not allow minor issues to interfere with what God is asking him to do.</p> <p>It's easy to get distracted by minor issues. Sometimes, at the end of the day, you look back and see lots of activity and nothing accomplished. Sometimes it's just life, but sometimes it's a lack of focus on what matters.</p> |
| 3/18/2022 | ROMANS 16 | <p>Paul gives final greetings to a number of people. Some have wondered how Paul could have known so many people in a church he never visited. No one knows for sure, but it's possible he had met people from Rome during his travels. Though Paul is dealing with issues of belief, he never forgot he was interacting with people, some of whom he knew and loved. For those who enjoy Bible study, there is the risk of it becoming an impersonal pursuit of knowledge. It should always include real impact on real people.</p> |
| 3/19/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
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| 3/21/2022 | HEBREWS 1 | <p>We don't know who wrote Hebrews and can only guess at the recipients. That makes it difficult to figure out why it was written. Based on comparisons to other literature, Bible scholars believe Hebrews was actually a sermon that was written down and turned into a letter format. It is thought that it was written to Christians who were being persecuted and moving away from their faith to avoid that persecution. Many of those turning away must have been Jewish Christians who were then returning to Judaism. One would guess it was written to Jews based on the name of the book, the heavy reliance on quotations from the Old Testament, and because much of the material in the book argues for how Jesus is superior to the Old Testament methods of dealing with sin. By way of introduction, chapter 1 declares that Jesus is superior to any created being. He is God's Son, participated in creation, and is the glory of God. Unlike any other, after dying for our sin, he sat at the right hand of God. This general statement of Jesus' superiority to everything is followed by showing that Jesus is superior to angels, as demonstrated by quoting Old Testament passages about angels and the Messiah, who is Jesus. People would hold messages received from angels in very high regard, how much more so a message received from Jesus?</p> <p>We have the honor of being in relationship with the Creator of the universe because that Creator chose to die for us. Do you take the relationship for granted? Do you consider the overwhelming sacrifice he made for you?</p> |
| 3/22/2022 | HEBREWS 2 | <p>When Jesus became a Man and walked on earth, he was temporarily lower than the angels. This is an indication of just how great he was because it shows his humility. He became human so he could experience the same things as humans and die for us. This is what made him the perfect sacrifice. In Christianity, humility is valued. Jesus, who is superior to everything in creation, becomes a man. He demonstrates greatness that intentionally subjugates itself to something lesser. It's an example we are supposed to follow. Unfortunately, many "superiors" demand respect, authority, and obedience rather than humbling themselves. If you are truly humble, you will not become angry when you are insulted, ignored or someone is placed over you. Jesus is also superior at being humble!</p> |

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| 3/23/2022 | HEBREWS 3 | <p>Moses would have been held in very high regard by Jews because he had given the people of Israel the law. We are told that Jesus is even greater than Moses. Jesus and Moses were both faithful to what God called them to do. The nation of Israel is portrayed as a house. Moses is part of the house, but Jesus, being the Creator, is the Builder. The building may be magnificent, but the Builder is the One who deserves the credit. If we go back to the Old Testament and see how the people behaved under Moses' leadership, we would find they were often rebellious. The writer is warning that we should not treat Jesus in the way Israel treated Moses.</p> <p>Who is your greatest hero? Maybe you look up to a parent, or leader in some area of interest; maybe a historical figure or brilliant thinker. Jesus is greater and worthy of our worship! Don't walk away from him when following him becomes inconvenient.</p> |
| 3/24/2022 | HEBREWS 4 | <p>The writer is drawing a parallel between a rest that Israel received and the rest promised to us. When Israel escaped slavery in Egypt and entered a land which was theirs, they looked forward to that rest. While on their way, some turned away from God and were never allowed to enter. We are warned not to turn away. Those who reject God's offer of salvation will not enter his rest. The writer quotes David referring to rest as something that would come in the future. Israel was already living in their land when David wrote, so the rest he was talking about was even greater than the one they already had. The Jewish readers would have been familiar with Israel's lack of faith and not being allowed to enter their land. They are being challenged not to make an even bigger mistake. If they reject Jesus, they will miss out on an even better rest. Jesus is then referred to as our High Priest. It was the duty of the High Priest to make sacrifices for the sins of the people. Jesus was similar to the High Priest because he sacrificed himself for our sin, but was different because he was sinless. Another part of the parallel to Israel entering their rest is that they needed to work in the present before entering rest in the future. Our lives here on earth are hard work. We suffer opposition, need to work to provide for ourselves and strive to keep moving forward spiritually. The rest comes when we enter the arms of our Savior!</p> |

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| 3/25/2022 | HEBREWS 5 | <p>The idea of Jesus being a High Priest continues. The writer observes that the High Priest is from among the people, represents the people in sacrificing for sin, understands human weakness to sin and is appointed by God. All of these traits were true of Jesus. We are going to hear more about a priest named Melchizedek later, but he was a priest to Abraham, the father of all of Israel. The writer breaks from his subject to scold his audience for their lack of understanding. What is being explained is something they should already have understood.</p> <p>We should not be slow to learn like the original audience. Hardship should not be an excuse to fall away, but a reason to look at Jesus suffering for us and be willing to suffer for him.</p> |
| 3/26/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 3/27/2022 | | Today is a day for catch-up or reflection |
| 3/28/2022 | HEBREWS 6 | <p>The writer continues to express concern for those who are struggling to accept the basic teachings of Christianity. Those who continue to treat Jesus with contempt cannot possibly be saved. The expectation is that they will come to a complete understanding of the truth.</p> <p>Are you understanding and accepting the truth, or are you like the people to whom Hebrews is written? Not following the truth may be easier in a temporary way, but our eternity is determined by what we do with Jesus.</p> |

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| 3/29/2022 | HEBREWS 7 | <p>We return to the subject of Melchizedek. He is a mostly unknown person to us, but he was Abraham’s priest. Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, had a descendant named Levi, and God had commanded all priests to be descendants of Levi. When the writer claims Jesus acted as High Priest when he paid for their sin on the cross, the Jews objected because Jesus was not a descendant of Levi. The writer points to Melchizedek who was a priest before Levi was born. He argues that Melchizedek was greater than Israel’s priest because he was the priest of their father, Abraham. We know nothing of his ancestry, when he was born or when he died, yet he is a great priest because God appointed him. Therefore, Jesus is like Melchizedek in that he is a priest, not because he descended from Levi, but because God appointed him. You may be thinking that you don’t care about all those Old Testament rules, so this doesn’t have anything to do with you. To an extent, that’s true. This was written to Jewish Christians who were having trouble making the transition from their former way of life following the Old Testament law to depending on Jesus alone for their salvation. However, it is good to note that the writer is treating the Old Testament with respect and showing the God of the Old is the same God as in the New Testament. God is always faithful to keep his promises!</p> |
| 3/30/2022 | HEBREWS 8 | <p>The way Israel worshipped in the Old Testament was a picture of what was coming. They made sacrifices, had a High Priest who made those sacrifices for them and built a tabernacle in which to worship. The priests and sacrifices pointed to the fact that sin had to be paid for, and the tabernacle was patterned after what God showed him. The new covenant, or system for being God’s people, is better than the old one because Jesus is the sacrifice, High Priest and minister in heaven. In addition people who trust Jesus move from obeying God because it is forced on them to obeying God because it is in their hearts and minds to desire what God wants. Israel enjoyed a special relationship with God in the Old Testament, but wanting to return to that relationship makes no sense. We have it so much better being able to be God’s children through Jesus. Hopefully you are so thankful for Jesus’ sacrifice for you that you desire to live as he wants us to live.</p> |

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| 3/31/2022 | HEBREWS 9 | <p>Repairing your relationship with God in the Old Testament involved going to a special building and observing ceremonies overseen by priests. There is something very comforting about those kinds of ceremonies, but the writer of Hebrews is pointing out their limited access to God. Because of the death of Jesus, we have unlimited access to God. It was Jesus' blood that was sacrificed to repair our relationship with God, rather than that of animals. Jesus was a much greater sacrifice with an eternal result!</p> <p>Having unlimited access to God is a great privilege we often take for granted. We can go to God in prayer anywhere, at any time. We can confess our sins directly and not carry them around until the next opportunity to go to a temple or see a priest. But people often carry the guilt of sin around with them and don't take care of it right away. If you are carrying guilt around today, confess it now. Go immediately to God through your High Priest, Jesus, and tell God you are sorry, want to avoid sinning like that again and have your relationship with God made right.</p> |
| 4/1/2022 | HEBREWS 10 | <p>The writer tells us Jesus' sacrifice is greater than those described in the Old Testament. The Old Testament sacrifices had to be done on an ongoing basis; Jesus was only sacrificed once. Had the Old Testament sacrifices been sufficient, they would not have needed to continue. In this way, the Old Testament sacrifices made it obvious they were to be replaced by something greater. The Jews who are turning away from Christ and back to being Jews were turning their backs on the greater sacrifice, Jesus, and on their fellow Christians. They are warned not to do that.</p> <p>It isn't easy to follow Jesus. We may be tempted to walk away from God or the church. Walking away from Jesus is the biggest mistake a person can make, but walking away from the church is close to it. The church is supposed to be a gathering of people trying to follow Jesus as best they can. We need each other to keep going, especially when it's hard.</p> |