



my grandma time

...doing simple things together!

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Week 46, Day 1 --- John 14-17

John 14 – Jesus the Way to the Father

John 14:6 is one of the most important verses in the Bible. It is the verse that explains why Christians are so determined to share the good news of Jesus with others. Many people believe that anyone who lives a good life will find their way to eternal life. Jesus is very clear that this isn't the way life works. He claims to be the only way. This leaves everyone who hears of Jesus with a choice to either believe Him and accept Him or to not believe Him and reject Him.

This chapter also introduces the concept of the trinity. Jesus speaks of Himself as being the same as or one with the Father. He also speaks of the "Spirit of truth" who is spoken of in other places as the Holy Spirit. All three of these together are God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Here are some questions to consider:

- If you had given up everything to follow Jesus for 3 years and all of a sudden He told you He was going away, how would you feel?
- Which of the things that Jesus tells His disciples do you find the most comforting?

John 15 – The Vine and the Branches

We often say that a person's last words are their most important. This is because when a person knows they are going to die we are certain that what they want to communicate really matters to them. I think this is true. As you read the next few chapters of John you will be reading Jesus' last words to His disciples. This chapter contains a great promise and a great warning.

The great promise is that if we remain in Jesus that we will produce fruit. There has been much argument over what the fruit are. I think the best description of the fruit is provided in Galatians 5:22,23. God desires a relationship with us. Jesus wants us to be as connected to Him as a branch is to a vine. I have a grape vine that covers my deck. Each year I have to prune the vine. The vine that I cut off looks just like the vine that remains during the winter. When spring comes the difference is clear. The branches that look dead burst forth with new green leaves. The branches that were cut off just rot and produce nothing. Prayer and Bible reading are the simplest and most obvious ways to stay connected to Jesus.

The great warning is that when we follow Jesus we will be treated the same way Jesus was treated. I think that most of us have this unreasonable expectation that if we are kind as Jesus was kind that everyone will like us and treat us well. Jesus says that we should expect just the opposite. The more we are like Him, the more likely it is that we will be persecuted. The disciples who were listening as Jesus said these things certainly experienced this. As far as we know all of them except John died as martyrs.

- Why does Jesus use the grape vine to describe our relationship with Him?
- What does Jesus say is most important?
- What pulls you away from remaining in Jesus?

John 16 – Jesus is Going Away

There is so much in this chapter. It is a very person chapter. There are certainly promises in Jesus' words that apply to us, but it is important to first focus on what He is saying to His disciples.

Jesus knows that He is going to be crucified, rise from the dead, and then ascend back into heaven. He knows that His crucifixion will crush the disciples. How would you feel if you had given away everything you owned, left your family and friends, and followed a man you thought was going to be King? How would you feel when that man is hanging on a cross and you are hiding out to save your life?

Jesus knows that His followers are going to experience a wide range of emotions and that most of them are not going to be positive. He is trying to prepare them for what is coming. He makes two promises. The first is that He is not going to leave them alone. He will send someone to be with them. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a counselor. The Greek word that is translated counselor literally means "one who comes alongside". We know from other descriptions of the Holy Spirit that He lives inside of us. What we learn from this is that He is sent to help us, to walk beside us whatever we go through.

Jesus second promise is that His followers will see Him again. I don't know if they remembered this while they were grieving since they seem totally surprised to see Jesus alive. Jesus makes the promise anyway and He always keeps His promises. The joy that comes from Jesus resurrection will not come without pain. How much pain did you have to go through before beginning to experience the joy that comes from believing in the resurrection?

There is one more promise in this chapter and it is a promise that we like to forget. Jesus promises us peace in the midst of struggle. To me, peace is the absence of worry. It is the ability to relax in the understanding that God is in control. There are many things that we cannot overcome on our own. We are promised that we will have trouble. Praise God that Jesus has overcome the world. He did rise from the dead and because of His resurrection we can also overcome death and experience peace and joy.

- How does it feel to follow someone who lets you down?
- What are the character qualities you look for in a friend?
- What trouble in your life do you need Jesus to overcome?

John 17 – The Prayer of Jesus

In Matthew 6 Jesus give His disciples a model prayer when they ask how they should pray. This prayer is not necessarily a model for us to follow, but does show us what was on Jesus' heart and mind as He faced death on the cross. Over and over Jesus mentions the fact that He and God the Father are one. They are in complete unity. It is Jesus' prayer, His desire, that those who follow Him be unified in the same way.

It is very obvious that this prayer has not been answered with a "yes" by God. I have no question in my mind that the unity of believers is God's desire. The only thing that could be keeping this from happening is God's even greater desire that we love Him as He loves us. That cannot happen if God forces us to love Him and to love one another. So, God chooses to limit Himself and doesn't force us to do what He very much wants us to do. Instead, Jesus shows us what this kind of love and unity look like by willingly going to die on the cross.

- How would the world be different if Jesus' prayer was answered with a big "YES"?
- Why do Christians fight and kill one another?
- What is Jesus asking of you in His prayer?

Week 46, Day 2 --- Mark 15 - Matthew 27

Crucifixion is one of the most painful means of execution ever devised. The person being crucified dies from suffocation when they can no longer stand the pain required to hold themselves up to breathe. It generally took more than a day to die. The amazing thing about this story is that Jesus was willing to endure all this pain. The leaders in the crowd taunted Him to come down from the cross. They and we are very fortunate that He didn't, because He could have. God's response seen through the darkness and the earthquake makes it clear that this was a painful time for God as Father as well. Jesus and God the Father are so intimately connected that God must have experience the pain as well. More painful than the nails and the scars were all the sins that were placed on Jesus on the cross. The more you get to know Jesus the more you'll come to appreciate the pain He went through for your benefit. Jesus paid the price for us to spend all of eternity with God. I'm glad He did, but reading about it is painful.

Week 46, Day 3 --- John 18-19 - Luke 23

John 18 – Betrayal and Denial

There is so much in this chapter that it is hard to know where to begin. One of the most important things to remember is how much power Jesus has. There are people who have a high tolerance for pain that they have developed because they are weak. There are a few who have great self-control and can withstand a great deal of suffering even though they are strong. Jesus is the most incredible example of this. He quietly and calmly endured one insult and attack after another without retaliation when a single word would have destroyed everyone and everything around Him.

We want to be like Jesus, but we are more often like Peter. In the emotion of the moment in the garden Peter is brave. In the face of trained soldiers he draws his sword and attacks. He should have been killed, but Jesus saves him and one of the other gospels tells us that Jesus even heals the man Peter

attacked. However, once the emotion of the moment is gone and Jesus allows Himself to be arrested Peter becomes a coward. When asked if he knows Jesus he lies and claims to never have known Him.

There is a part of this story that would be humorous if it wasn't so sad. The religious leaders must take Jesus to the Roman authorities for trial because they have no right to execute anyone. In their minds Jesus must die even though He is guilty of nothing. They want to murder Him to preserve their political positions. The list of Jewish laws they are breaking in what they are doing to Jesus goes on and on, but they do not enter Pilate's house so that they will not be unclean and can eat the Passover. Never put religious practice or tradition before doing what is right.

This story is full of cowards. Pilate knows that there is no reason to crucify Jesus. However, he values his position far more than he values any human life. Killing an innocent man doesn't really bother him. He doesn't lead. Instead, he polls the crowd and gives them what they want. Does this sound familiar?

- What do you learn about Jesus from this story?

John 19 – The Crucifixion

Fear is a dangerous thing. When we let it take control of us we are very likely to do the wrong thing. There are two people who are afraid in this chapter. One gives in to his fears and Jesus is crucified as a result. The other overcomes his fears and Jesus receives a proper burial.

Pilate was the ruler of Palestine, the home of Jesus. The Jews were no longer allowed to rule themselves, so they had no king. However, the Jews were a very rebellious people and Pilate was afraid that the leaders who were requesting that Jesus be killed would bring an end to his career if he didn't give in to their wishes. John makes it very clear that Pilate knew that Jesus was not guilty and that he was being used to do something the Jews were not allowed to do. The Romans had taken away from the Jews the authority to inflict capital punishment. If the Jews could have killed Jesus he would have been stoned to death. Instead, he died by crucifixion which was a uniquely Roman style of execution. Crucifixion is probably still the cruelest way to execute anyone. The nails through the hands and feet were intensely painful, but the real torture came in the slowness of death. Most people who were crucified died slowly of suffocation as they were no longer able to push their bodies up in order to breathe. The Romans invented this form of execution because they ruled through fear. Crucifixion was a form of public torture that would breed fear in anyone.

However, Jesus didn't die of suffocation. In addition to the physical torture of the cross Jesus was taking on the sins of the entire world and enduring a brief period of separation from His Father. All of this combined was sufficient to break His heart. John tells us that when Jesus side was pierced with the spear blood and water flowed out together. Medical experts tell us that this is what happens when the heart bursts or breaks.

The person who saw all this and overcame fear as a result was Joseph. He had a very high position in society and took a real chance when he went to Pilate and asked for the body. Most people who were crucified were simply dumped in a garbage heap. If Jesus would have been thrown on a garbage heap there would have been no empty tomb and evidence for the resurrection. Instead, Jesus received a proper burial including 75 pounds of spices being wrapped onto His body.

One of the most important things we learn in this chapter is that Jesus really died. I don't know if Jesus was ever afraid. I do know that if He was ever afraid that He never gave in to His fears. He always did the right thing.

- What are you afraid of?
- What has happened in your life when you've made decisions based on fear?

Week 46, Day 4 --- Mark 16 - Matthew 28

First I want to make a comment on a note you will see in your NIV Bible. In Mark 16 it says this:

[The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have verses 9–20.]

We don't have the original copies of what the authors of the New Testament wrote. Instead, we have very early copies. When people are doing translations they compare all these copies to determine what the original said. In the case of these verses the newer copies all include these verses, but the oldest copies don't. This probably means that these verses were added by someone later. As you read through the rest of the gospels you'll see that many of these verses are supported. However, it is best to not build a practice, such as snake handling, on these verses because they are questionable.

The important point of today's chapters is that Jesus is alive. He did not stay dead, but instead came to life again. This is great news because it means that we don't have to stay dead. We are going to live forever. Now our responsibility is the same as the one that Jesus gave to His disciples. As we are going about our daily lives we are to seek to get other people to follow Jesus just as we are following Jesus. This is what it means to make disciples.

Week 46, Day 5 --- John 20-21 - Luke 24

He is risen. He is risen indeed. This was the primary greeting in the early church. The event that gave everyone hope was the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus being alive says that life rules rather than death, good has ultimately defeated evil, and we have life and hope as a result.

Jesus was different after His resurrection. He could still be touched and He could eat, but He could also go through locked doors without opening them. While His physical appearance may have been different, His love for people had not changed. Peter had denied Jesus three times and felt a terrible sense of shame. Jesus takes the time to allow Peter to confess His loyalty and love for Jesus three times. Peter is restored and goes on to be a great leader in the church.

Week 46, Day 6 --- Acts 1-3

The full title for this book is The Acts of the Apostles. Just as the four gospels are the story of Jesus' life on earth, the book of Acts is the story of the apostles and the beginning of the church. The story begins in Jerusalem and will eventually end up in Rome. It begins with Peter and the other apostles and will end focusing on Paul who is not even a part of the original twelve, but that will come later. For three years Jesus had been with the disciples. A disciple is a student or a follower. Now that Jesus had gone back to heaven these same men are called apostles. An apostle is one who is sent. These men were being sent on a mission. They were still disciples, followers of Jesus, but they were also being sent out to make other disciples and so they were called apostles. They were not sent out alone. Jesus had promised before He died that they would have a comforter, companion, and guide. They wait in Jerusalem for this comforter and one day they are immersed in and filled with the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts could also be title the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 is the first gospel sermon ever preached. What are Peter's main points? How do the people respond?

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

There was an immediate response and then the people went back to their daily lives. They were changed and their daily activities changed. They spent as much time as possible learning more about Jesus, spending time together doing life together which included sharing their financial resources, eating together which included celebrating the special meal that Jesus gave them before He died, and praying. This is what the church is supposed to be about. If we're not doing this then we're missing something.

Week 46, Day 7 --- Acts 4-6

Highs and lows are what you'll find in today's reading. This was an incredible time. A small group of less than 100 very frightened people had suddenly become a group of over 3000 very courageous and outspoken witnesses for the resurrected Jesus. They loved Jesus and their new life so much that everyone's physical needs were met. Chapter 4 is a picture of the church and the world as God intended it, but it doesn't last long.

In chapter 5, pride and the desire for human recognition threaten the church. Read very carefully. Ananias does not die because he decided to keep some of the money from the sale of his land. Instead, he dies because he tells the apostles that the money he brought was everything he received for the land. He was telling a lie while using money to try to gain position in the church.

In chapter 6 we begin to see the unity of the church falling apart. Remember back to the Old Testament when the Jews went into captivity. Some Jews returned to Israel, but others stayed in other countries. These foreign Jews are called Hellenistic Jews. Hellenistic is another term for someone who has adopted the Greek culture and language. These widows were still Jews, but they were considered lower than the Jews from the land of Israel. The problem was addressed in a very practical way and we see structure begin to emerge in the church.

What is most important in these chapters is the interaction that the apostles have with the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was like the Senate for Israel. It was a group of seventy men who made the laws for the land of Israel under the authority of the Romans. Unlike our country, both church and state were combined. These men made both civil and religious laws. They were clearly opposed to the message that Jesus had risen and wanted the apostles to stop. The apostles would not stop and the message of Jesus continued to spread.