



GUARD THE GOSPEL

An instructive journey
through the Christian Faith

Version 1

Introduction

For those teaching these studies:

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and Godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” - 2 Peter 1:3

“I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” - Romans 15:14

The book you hold in your hand is proof that The Lansing Area Church of Christ takes these verses very seriously. Through His word God has given us all that we need for life and godliness. He has also given us the ability to instruct others in the way that leads to life. Knowing what scriptures to share to help someone grow closer to God is one thing. Knowing how to impact someone's heart is another. This workbook attempts to do both. Some people believe that you need a degree in theology to teach God's word but Jesus called all Christians to effectively share their faith. Studying the bible with others is a great learning process. May you enjoy every minute of it!

For those going through these studies for the first time:

“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” - Romans 10:17

We are exposed to the bible's message in many ways. Our church experiences, pastors, parents, friends and media all shape the way we hear God's message. All of these influences can be helpful in our relationship with God but they cannot compare to the experience of studying the word of God for ourselves. These studies are God's message in pure form. The questions that accompany the scriptures have been written to help you and the person studying with you to apply the scriptures to your heart. The challenge is to try to listen to this pure message like you've never heard it before. The true word of God is challenging, inspiring, cutting and encouraging. May you enjoy every minute of it!

Joel Nagel

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Starting the Journey

Seeking God

Have you ever studied the bible before?

Do you read the bible? Do you pray? What is it like?

Do you go to church? What is it like?

What do you hope to learn from these studies?

Purpose

To show how much we need God

To show how much God wants us

To give practical advice and support about how to effectively (biblically) seek God

Let's look at what the bible says about seeking God:

Mathew 7:7-8

What does this passage promise?

What does that mean for you?

That is a great guarantee!

Matthew 7:13-14

This verse seems to contradict vv. 7-8. What does it mean that "everyone who seeks finds," but, "only a few find it?"

So there is a certain way to seek God that guarantees we'll find him, what is it?

Matthew 6:33

According to this verse how are we to seek?

What would a person's life look like who seeks God first?

Have you been seeking God first? If not, what have you put before God? What keeps you from making God your top priority?

What does it mean to seek his righteousness? His kingdom?

Luke 15:1-7

Who is God in this parable? What is he doing? How much does God care about you?

Luke 15:8-10

Who is God now? What is your image of God, how does it affect your relationship with him?

Luke 15:11-24

Can you relate with this parable?

Does God care more about your past or about having a relationship with you?

God will stop at nothing to love you and be in a relationship with you. Will you seek him first?

What changes will you need to make in your life to have God as your first priority?

Before the next study read these passages about people who put God first:

Acts 8:26-40

How did the eunuch show humility?

Acts 17:11-12

What did the Bereans do to be noble? What could you do to be like them?

The next study will be at _____

Notes

The Word of God

Some questions before you begin:

What did you learn from the last study?

What did you learn from the scriptures in Acts?

In what ways have you put God first since our last study?

What has been challenging?

Do you have any questions before we begin the next study?

Purpose

To show the power of God's word

To make the bible the standard for your life

Let's look at what the bible says about itself:

Hebrews 4:12-13

What does it mean that the word is living and active?

How has it been alive and active in your life?

How is God's word like a sharp sword?

Everything will be laid bare before God and we will be judged by his word. What does that say about the importance of reading the bible?

1 Timothy 4:16

What is the difference between life and doctrine? Which is more important?

Can you think of an example of someone with a good life but wrong doctrine? Is that a saving faith? Also think of someone with the right doctrine who doesn't live it out. Will they save themselves and their hearers?

Why does keeping life and doctrine in check require perseverance and a close watch?

Do you know if your life is in line with God's word? What about your doctrine?

Extra: Why are there so many beliefs?

- Because men and churches have 'exited' from the bible being the only standard and adopted other standards.
- Easy way (2 Timothy 4:2-3, Isaiah 30:10-11, John 8:31-32)
- eXtra teachings (Proverbs 30:6, Deut 4:2, 12:32, 1 Cor 4:4, Revelation 22:18-19)
- Ignorance (Matt 22:29, Hosea 4:6, Isaiah 1:2, 2 Timothy 2:15)
- Traditions (Matt 15:6-9, Mark 7:6-9)

2 Timothy 3:16-17

What does it mean that “all scripture is God-breathed”?

Do you believe that? (2 Peter 2:20)

How could you use the bible for “teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness”? Devotion to God’s Word will make you ready for anything.

John 8:30-32

Who is Jesus talking to? Is belief enough or is the bible’s standard something more?

To truly be his disciples and experience freedom (salvation) what are we to do? (James 1:22)

What are some things that would help you “hold” to His teaching?

John 12:47-48

In the end what standard will we be judged by?

If you got to see a copy of the test before a big exam what would you do?

God's word is essential in our lives and for salvation. Will you make God's Word your only standard?

What changes will you need to make? What will be challenging about having the bible as your only standard?

Before the next study:

Take the Berean challenge (Acts 17:11) and read you bible every day.
What book will you begin with?

Do you have a notebook to take notes?

The next study will be at _____

Notes

Discipleship

Some questions before you begin:

What sticks out to you from the last study?

Have you had any challenges since making the bible your standard?

What have you read since the last study? Did you take notes? What did you learn?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Purpose

To illustrate the Bible's standard for followers of Jesus

To commit to being a disciple of Jesus Christ

Extra: Does the Bible have a double standard?

Acts 11:26c is the first of three times that the scriptures use the word "Christian."

The word "disciple" occurs over 200 times in the New Testament. The religious world prefers to use the "easier" term but the scriptures teach us one standard for following Jesus no matter what you call it. God is not schizophrenic. Christian, disciple of Jesus, believer, follower, child of God, born again, and many more all describe the same thing: the committed lifestyle of faith that leads to salvation. Mark 16:16

The Call

Mark 1:16-20

Jesus did not just come so we would believe, what else was in his message?

This is the beginning of his ministry, are the expectations for those first disciples any different than for disciples today?

Discipleship

What did it mean for them to follow Jesus? What does it mean for you?

Jesus wants to make his disciples into “fishers of men,” how will that change your life?

These men were given a whole new mission in life, what have you been living for?

Notice their eagerness and excitement, how do you feel about becoming a fisher of men? How will you begin?

Luke 19:10

As followers of Jesus our mission should be the same as his. What do the active words seek and save mean to you?

Can you think of some people in your life that are “lost”?

The Commission

Matthew 28:18-20

We looked at the beginning and the middle of His ministry and now we come to some of His last words, very important and special, and he gives us his mission.

What is the mission of every believer in Jesus Christ?

Discipleship

When someone becomes a disciple, what is the next step?

A commitment to discipleship and baptism are just the beginning. What are disciples expected to learn throughout their lives? How will you do that?

There is a great promise for true disciples, Jesus will be with us forever!

The Cost

Luke 9:23-26

The context of this verse is right after Peter's confession of belief in Jesus Christ. Jesus goes on to teach what life as a believer will entail.

What is the significance of the words "if anyone..."?

What does it mean to deny self? Have you lived a lifestyle of self denial? What will it look like?

What does it mean to take up your cross daily? What was the cross in Jesus day? Has this been your daily lifestyle? What will you do differently?

Have you completely given your life to Jesus, not only in words and thoughts, but in action and lifestyle? How will this cost affect your life? (Luke 9:57-62)

Discipleship

Luke 14:25-33

What strikes you about this “if anyone” passage? What does it mean to “hate” your family, friends, and even yourself? (Luke 16:13) Is this how you have loved God or are there “close seconds” in your life? What are the biggest threats to putting God first?

What does the first parable tell you about the seriousness of building a relationship with God? Have you ever sat down and counted the cost?

What is the meaning of the second parable? Who are the big and little kings? What is the final cost of being a disciple?

How much have you been giving God? Will He accept anything less than 100%? What will your life look like when you give him your all?

Review the call, the commission, and the cost now: Have you been living just like a biblical disciple? What areas need to change to match the Bible’s standard?

If you have not been living by the Bible’s standard for believers then what does that say about your salvation?

Discipleship

How important is it to attend a church that expects all of its members to live out the biblical standard of Jesus' call, commission, and cost?

Do you want to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ?

Before the next study:

Start living the great commission by sharing with friends and family.

Keep reading the bible and praying every day.

Come to all the meetings of the church.

The next study will be at: _____

Discipleship

Notes

Sin

Some questions before we begin:

What do you remember from the last study?

What has been the biggest change in your life?

What is the most challenging part?

Do you have any questions from our studies or your own reading?

Purpose

To understand how sin affects our lives and our salvation.

To be open about sin and start on the road to repentance.

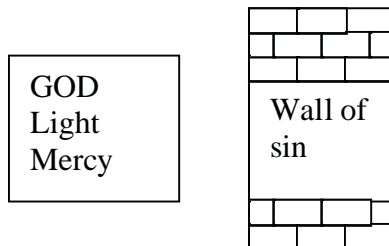
Romans 3:23, 6:23

Is anyone without sin? What do you think it means to “sin”? The Greek word is hamrtia, to miss the mark?

What does a lifestyle of sin earn for us?

Isaiah 59:1-2

What does this passage tell us about the affect of sin? When we talk about salvation, what is it that we need saved from?



In the above diagram where would a sinful person be? When the sin is removed a person is united with God and saved. Do you know what the bible says about how to knock down the wall of sin?

Sin

Before we can discuss taking the wall down we should look specifically at what it is made of so we can stop adding more bricks of sin.

Mark 7:20-23

Where does sin come from? Whose fault is it when we sin?

There are many lists of sins like this in the scriptures. Let's look at a more complete list and talk about how each sin causes us to fall short.

Extra: Do I have to confess?

Confessing sin can be uncomfortable but the more thoroughly someone confesses the more able they will be to truly change and live for God.

1 John 1:8-10 – We all sin so it's not a shock to God (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

- Our salvation depends on confession

- We will never stop sinning, so get in the habit of being open

James 5:16 – We are also called to confess to one another so we can powerfully pray for each other. Revealing our sin so it can be dealt with is always more important than retaining an image of righteousness.

* We want to believe that we are 'good people' but Jesus said "no one is good except God alone." A great exercise to understand your sinfulness is to make a list of all the sins you have ever committed. Looking at the list, you realize that you are not a good person, but a person in need of God's grace!

Galatians 5:19-21

God has given us a conscience so that we don't need a PhD to know when we're sinning

As you go through this list share with one another how you have sinned. Write down the sins you are currently dealing with and what you will do differently.

Sin

What will be the most difficult things to change?

James 4:17

This is God's standard on what a sin is. We can sin just as easily by not doing something, sin of omission.

Look back at the diagram of the wall of sin. Think about how you have lived your life up to this point. Which side of the wall are you on? What does that say about your salvation?

The Good News is that God has stopped at nothing to be united with us by removing our sins. In the next studies we will look at what God has done and how we can become forgiven and therefore, saved.

Take some time to pray together now.

Before the next study:

Spend special time praying about your life so far and how you want to change and live for God.

Write down solutions for the three toughest sins in your life.

The next study will be at: _____

Sin

Notes

Sin | 19

The Cross and Resurrection

Some questions before you begin:

What have you been reading in your bible?

Have you had any memorable prayer times?

What has stuck with you since the last study?

Has anything been particularly difficult?

Purpose:

To personalize Christ's redemptive work on the cross

To illustrate the hope of our new life in Christ

Romans 6:23

We have learned about the wages of sin, now we will see the wonderful gift of God.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

This prophecy was written some 700 years before Jesus. God planned from the beginning to take our sins so we could be saved. How does this passage make you feel?

Matthew 26:31-28:10

This is the "passion" account of Matthew. Discuss key events as you read. Seeing how far God is willing to go for you to be close to Him, what is the necessary response?

The Cross and Resurrection

Extra: A Medical Account of the Crucifixion

At the back of this book the text of a medical account of Christ's crucifixion has been included to enlighten you about what it means to suffer death by crucifixion.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

What does it mean to be compelled? How has Christ loved us?

The cross is our constant motivation to be faithful Christians. "One died for all, and therefore all died."

The power of the cross actually lies in the resurrection. Jesus has no tomb or shrine where we can visit his body. He rose as a new creation. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come."

What does it mean to be a new creation? What will it look like for you?

What is reconciliation? How can you be a minister of reconciliation and an ambassador for Christ?

The Cross and Resurrection

Think about the last verse: “we might become the righteousness of God.” Think about all the sin in your life; Jesus’ goal is that you could be the righteousness of God! This is the hope of Christianity! How does that feel?

God has done all of this so you, and everyone, could be saved. But in all of our studies so far we still have not learned from the scriptures how to be “in Christ” and receive biblical salvation. In the next couple of studies we will tackle this question.

Before the next study:

Spend special time in prayer thanking God for the cross and the resurrection of Christ. Pray about what life as a new creation will look like for you.

The next study will be at _____

The Cross and Resurrection

Notes

Repentance

Some questions before you begin:

How has your relationship with God grown since you began studying the bible?

How have your relationships with Christians grown? What benefit have you seen?

How has the study on the cross and the resurrection affected you?

Do you have any questions from the studies so far?

Purpose:

To learn the true meaning of biblical repentance and begin living a repentant lifestyle.

Luke 13:1-5

What does the word 'repentance' mean to you?

Greek word is *metanoia*: *Meta* – Change *Noia* – Mindset

Do you remember what the wages of sin are? So it makes sense that if we do not repent we will perish.

Think about your sin, in what ways do you need to change your mindset to see things like Jesus?

Repentance

Acts 26:19-21

Paul preached the unpopular message of repentance everywhere he went. It remains unpopular today because it requires a sober look and true life change.

Is it possible to tell if someone has repented? How?

Although repentance is a decision it is carried out by actions that may be seen by all.

Have you ever had a significant change in your behavior – a time when everyone said, “What has come over you, you are different?”

2 Corinthians 7:10-11

An earlier letter to the church in Corinth caused them to repent, here Paul elaborates on the nature of their repentance and ours.

What is the difference between Godly sorrow and worldly sorrow?

Worldly sorrow leads to death (there is no repentance and sin leads to death). Godly sorrow leads to real change (repentance) and leads to salvation. Repentance is part of becoming saved because we are saved from sin.

Repentance

Look at the characteristics that Godly sorrow produces, how could they aid you in repenting?

Are you eager to do the will of God? Do you have the heart of the Corinthians?

Matthew 5:29-30

Here Jesus uses grand exaggeration to show the radical spirit that followers of Jesus must adopt toward sin.

Our world teaches us that sin is okay in moderation but Jesus teaches that we must hate sin and deal with it drastically.

Do you share God's attitude toward sin?

Do you think you have repented in accordance with what the bible teaches? When? If not, do you want to? What will your life look like? (Discipleship)

2 Peter 3:8-9

Do you know many people who have repented like this, according to the bible's definition of repentance?

Repentance

How do you think you could help other people to truly repent?

Acts 3:19

How will you need help and support as you repent? Repentance is an exciting thing, a blessing from the Lord!

Before the next study:

Take time to examine all the areas of your life. What parts of your character need to be crucified? What will it take? Come to the next study dead to your old life.

The next study will be at: _____

Repentance

Notes

Biblical Salvation

Some questions before you begin:

What do you remember from our last study?

How has the repentance (life change) been going? What has been difficult?

Have you been living like a disciple? Studying the word and praying daily, sharing your faith and meeting with the body?

Do you have any questions so far?

Consider the studies you have done up to this point. You have learned how to seek God and find him. You have decided to make the bible your standard. You learned the lifestyle of a disciple of Jesus. You learned that sin leads to death and that sin is what separates us from God and keeps us from being saved. When the sin is removed we are saved; no longer separated from God. You learned that Jesus died on the cross for you while you were still a sinner. You learned that repentance is changing your mindset from a sinful, self focused outlook to seeing things Jesus' way and living accordingly. In all of these studies and all the scriptures you've read, have you seen anything that tells you how to biblically receive salvation?

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to learn what the bible teaches about salvation.

Biblical Salvation

Ephesians 4:4-6

Baptism is a basic Christian doctrine, along with communion, one of only two rites that Jesus passed down to us. It is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizdo* which means to immerse or dunk.

What do you think the significance of baptism is? Have you seen many baptisms? Have you been baptized?

In the book of Acts, the biblical history of the early churches, we find that baptism is how people were forgiven of their sins, we see people being saved.

Acts 2:36-41

This passage is significant because it is the first sermon of the New Testament church, our church. Peter, by the power of the Holy Spirit, lays out the steps to salvation in the new covenant or promise.

Peter's sermon ends in 2:36 with a summary of what someone coming to Christ must believe.

What do you need to believe? What does it mean that "you" crucified Jesus? What does it mean to have Jesus as Lord? What does Christ mean?

A lot of people want Jesus as Christ (savior), but few want him as Lord (master). Is Jesus Lord and Christ in your life?

Biblical Salvation

The people believed and were “cut to the heart” by the message. They ask Peter and the apostles, “What shall we do?”

This is the attitude of true belief. Not, “This is what I’ll do,” but, “I’ll do anything, what shall I do?” Have you been cut to the heart, will you do whatever the bible teaches?

If mere belief were enough to be saved the chapter would end with Peter saying, “You’ve already done it.” But he goes on and answers the question of what to do.

“Repent.” In 2 Corinthians we read that repentance “leads to salvation” and now we see it as a part of the salvation process.

“And be baptized.” When a person believes that Jesus died for them and is now their Lord and Christ, then dies to their own sinful lifestyle in repentance, and is baptized, salvation is promised. And not only salvation but the gift of the Holy Spirit (a seal and a counselor), and membership in God’s church, the kingdom.

In all of our studies, this is the first scripture we have read that promises the forgiveness of sins. This is how the first church taught salvation and this is the way that people receive salvation to this day. “The promise is for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Promise is another way of saying testament. This is the New Testament. 3000 people believed, repented and were baptized that day. 3000 people received forgiveness for all their sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit and were added to their number.

Biblical Salvation

Is this the way that you were taught about salvation? Have you seen it taught differently? Why do you think there are so many ideas about how someone gets saved?

One common question is why does baptism play such a prominent role in the salvation process? Paul explains it in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 6:1-5

Here Paul is addressing the Christians in Rome. They “were baptized into Christ Jesus” because that is how the first century Christians became Christians. Paul describes the process and the significance of baptism.

Baptism is our participation in Jesus death, burial and resurrection.

What part of the process relates most closely Paul’s exclamation, “we died to sin”?

It was a given that a true Christian died to sin in repentance.

What part of the process relates most closely with being “buried with him”?

Biblical Salvation

In baptism we are buried with Christ, so that we may rise having conquered death (sin).

When we come out of the water we live a new life (new creations). Verse 5 unmistakably relates all of this to salvation even using the word “certainly.”

What a promise, “If we have been united with him like this in his death will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” (Emphasis added)

A couple of diagrams will help to illustrate this process:

Look at these diagrams and read through the passage one more time.

Before a person is buried what do they need to do? What if someone who is not dead gets buried/baptized?

Biblical Salvation

Colossians 2:11-12

How do you see the salvation process laid out in these verses? Where are belief, repentance and baptism?

How important is it that we have proper faith when we are baptized?
Can baptism save when there is no faith?

1 Peter 3:18-21

How is baptism like the flood in the days of Noah? Notice that the flood symbolizes baptism not vice versa. Baptism is never called a symbol in the scriptures.

This verse flatly states that baptism saves. Does that mean that we are saved by works?

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that saves us through belief, repentance and baptism. Nothing we do saves us. We can never be good enough for God unless we are perfect. So does God save us by his grace alone? Yes. Does he require us to obediently follow his word in regards to becoming saved? Yes. True faith is always accompanied by action. (James 2:14-26)

Extra: False Doctrines about Salvation

2 Timothy 4:1-5 tells us that men will create false doctrines to suit their own desires. Galatians 6:1-9 tells us that no one has the right to alter the gospel. But teachings like "Original Sin" (Ezekiel 18:20), "Once saved, always saved" (Hebrews 10:26 and many others), "Faith Alone" (James 2:24) and "The Sinner's Prayer or Alter Calls" (Revelation 3:20-21) are all common doctrines that contradict the biblical plan of salvation.

Biblical Salvation

We see all of this exemplified in the conversion of the apostle Paul.

Acts 22:1-16

How do you see the salvation process being played out in Paul's life?

The same question is being asked of you today: What are you waiting for? Do you want to be saved according to the bible? Where are you in the process? When do you want to get baptized?

Before the next study:

Look through everything we have studied so far. Do you see how the scriptures fit together? Write down any questions you may have.

The next study will be at: _____

Biblical Salvation

Notes

The Church

Some questions before you begin:

Do you have any questions about anything we have studied or anything you have read?

How is your discipleship going?

Have you talked to anyone about what you've been learning?

What do you remember about the last study?

There is one more part of the salvation process that we did not discuss and that is perseverance.

Once we have become saved, staying saved (living out our salvation) becomes a focus in our new lives.

Matthew 28:18-20

This is the commission of the new life in Christ. Jesus has given all of the tools we need to stay faithful. He is with us always as his spirit lives in each of us. He has also given us the church and the relationships therein to help us live everyday for Him.

When you think about church what comes to mind? What has your experience with church been?

Purpose:

The purpose of today's study is to learn what the bible says about church and its role in our lives.

The Church

Colossians 1:15-20

This is a list of some of the awesome qualities of the risen Christ. Among other things he is the head of the church. What does a head do for the body? Can a body survive without a head?

The church is an organism not an organization or a building. The church of Christ has Jesus as its only head. This means that Jesus makes all the decisions. Tradition, intellect and cultural ideas can never take the place of Jesus' word.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

What can you learn about the biblical church from this passage?

In what ways do you need the church?

In what ways does the church need you?

The book called Hebrews was written for the purpose of helping Christians stay faithful so there is a lot we can learn from it about the nature of the church.

The Church

Hebrews 10:23-25

How will the church help you to “hold unwaveringly”?

What does it mean to spur one another on? How important is it to consider others? How can you practice this?

How important is it to meet together regularly? (Like logs in a camp fire) Do you know what all the meetings of the body are? Are you committed to being there?

Hebrews 3:12-14

Whose responsibility is it to keep each other from falling away?

How do we stay strong as Christians?

How could you live out the call to daily encouragement?

Real relationships keep our hearts from being hard. We can continue to confess sin, get advice or encouragement and help others. We accomplish this through out Home Groups ministry. Do you understand what home groups are all about? Who have you built relationships with in the church? Who would you like to get to know?

Why are real relationships important?

The Church

Acts 2:42-47

Here is the 1st century church in action. Our church strives to live up to these characteristics.

They were devoted, completely committed, to God's word, fellowship, communion (do you understand communion), and prayer.

There was a sense of awe and excitement.

They generously shared with one another to meet all kinds of needs. (For information on tithing see Malachi 3:6-12)

The body grew spiritually and numerically.

How do you feel about living this out?

Extra: Meeting you where you are

The church also meets our needs based on the stage of life we find ourselves in.

Marriage and parenting should be greatly strengthened by the church. Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Pet 3:1-7 and Ephesians 6:1-4 are just a few scriptures that form a biblical foundation for Christian marriage and parenting.

Singles are also strengthened by the standard of God's word. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Ephesians 5:1-7 and 1 Timothy 4:12 form the basis for the pure life that God expects and provide a biblical foundation for a great marriage.

The Church

Ephesians 2:19-22

Becoming a Christian is only the very beginning of the change and growth that will occur in a lifetime of discipleship. We are always being built together to become all that God wants us to be. The key word is together.

What are some things you can do to be an encouraging part of the body?

You have any immediate needs that the body can meet?

Who would you like to get to know better? How will you do it?

Before the next study:

Go over your notes and write down any questions you may have.

The next study will be “counting the cost” so consider is living for Jesus is really something you can commit to right now.

The next study will be at:_____

The Church

Notes

Counting the Cost

Purpose:

To review the bible studies and consider you are ready to make the lifelong commitment of becoming a Christian.

Scriptures to consider:

Luke 9:57-62

How many of these 3 become followers of Jesus? Why?

Luke 14-28-30

Have you counted the cost of this decision?

Review the topics you have studied now.

Some topics may be:

Conversion

Obstacles and challenges

Implications (what does this mean on a larger scale)

Implications of repentance

Implications of baptism

Purpose and mission

New Testament church

Meetings of the body

Dating and marriage

Finances

Discipleship relationships

Taking a firm stand with family and friends

Sacrifice and service

Lifelong decision

Counting the Cost

The awesome grace of God!

Do you really think you can live like this for the rest of your life?

What will be the most challenging part of this new life?

What are you most excited about?

Who do you think you will be able to impact?

Do you have any questions about anything?

Take time to pray together and discuss any plans that need to be made.

The next study will be (a follow up study) at _____

Medical Account

This led me first to a study of the practice of crucifixion itself; that is, the torture and execution of a person by fixation to a cross.

Apparently, the first known practice of crucifixion was by the Persians. Alexander and his generals brought it back to the Mediterranean world - Egypt and Carthage. The Romans apparently learned the practice from the Carthaginians and (as with almost everything the Romans did) rapidly developed a very high degree of efficiency and skill in carry it out. A number of Roman authors (Livy, Cicero, Tacitus) comment on it. Several innovations and modifications are described in the ancient literature; I'll mention only a few which may have some bearing here. The upright portion of the cross (or stipes) could have the cross-arm (or patibulum) attached two or three feet below its top - this is what we commonly think of today as the classical form of the cross (the one which we have later named the Latin cross); however, the common form used in Our Lords day was the Tau cross (shaped like the Greek letter Tau or like our T). In this cross the patibulum was placed in a notch at the top of the stipes. There is fairly overwhelming archeological evidence that it was on this type of cross that Jesus was crucified.

The upright post, or stipes, was generally permanently fixed in the ground at the site of execution and the condemned man was forced to carry the patibulum, apparently weighing about 110 pounds, from the prison to the place of execution. Without any historical or biblical proof, medieval and Renaissance painters have given us our picture of Christ carrying the entire cross. Many of these painters and most of the sculptors of crucifixes today show the nails through the palms. Roman historical accounts and experimental work have shown that the nails were driven between the small bones of the wrists and not through the palms.

Medical Account

Nails driven through the palms will strip out between the fingers when they support the weight of a human body. The misconception may have come about through a misunderstanding of Jesus words to Thomas, Observe my hands. Anatomists, both modern and ancient, have always considered the wrists as part of the hand.

A titulus, or small sign, stating the victims crime was usually carried at the front of the processions and later nailed to the cross above the head. This sign with its staff nailed to the top of the cross would have given it somewhat the characteristic form of the Latin cross.

The physical passion of the Christ begins in Gethsemane. Of the many aspects of this initial suffering, I shall only discuss the one of physiological interest; the bloody sweat. It is interesting that the physician of the group, St. Luke, is the only one to mention this. He says, And being in agony, He prayed the longer. And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground.

Every attempt imaginable has been used by modern scholars to explain away this phrase, apparently under the mistakes impression that this just doesnt happen.

A great deal of effort could be saved by consulting the medical literature. Though very rare, the phenomenon of Hematidrosis or bloody sweat, is well documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This process alone could have produced marked weakness and possible shock.

Medical Account

We shall move rapidly through the betrayal and arrest; I must stress that important portions of the passion story are missing from this account. This may be frustrating to you, but in order to adhere to our purpose of discussing only the purely physical aspects of the Passion, this is necessary. After the arrest in the middle of the night, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin and Caiphas, the High Priest; it is here that the first physical trauma is inflicted. A soldier struck Jesus across the face for remaining silent when questioned by Caiphas. The palace guards then blindfolded Him and mockingly taunted Him to identify them as they each passed by, spat on Him, and struck Him in the face.

In the morning, Jesus, battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night, is taken across Jerusalem to the Praetorium of the Fortress Antonia, the seat of government of the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. You are, of course, familiar with Pilate's action in attempting to pass responsibility to Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Judea. Jesus apparently suffered no physical mistreatment at the hands of Herod and was returned to Pilate.

It was then, in response to the cries of the mob, that Pilate ordered Bar-Abbas released and condemned Jesus to scourging and crucifixion. There is much disagreement among authorities about scourging as a prelude to crucifixion. Most Roman writers from this period do not associate the two. Many scholars believe that Pilate originally ordered Jesus scourged as his full punishment and that the death sentence by crucifixion came only in response to the taunt by the mob that the Procurator was not properly defending Caesar against this pretender who claimed to be the King of the Jews.

Medical Account

Preparations for the scourging are carried out. The prisoner is stripped of His clothing and His hands are tied to a post above His head. It is doubtful whether the Romans made any attempt to follow the Jewish law in this matter of scourging. The Jews had an ancient law prohibiting more than forty lashes. The Pharisees, always making sure that the law was strictly kept, insisted that only thirty-nine lashes be given. (In case of a miscount, they were sure of remaining within the law.) The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum (or flagellum) in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each.

The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they are cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped.

Medical Account

The half-fainting Jesus is then undied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be a king. They throw a robe across His shoulders and place a stick in His hand for a scepter. They still need a crown to make their travesty complete. A small bundle of flexible branches covered with long thorns (commonly used for firewood) are plaited into the shape of a crown and this is pressed into His scalp. Again there is copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body.) After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. Finally, they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from His back. This had already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal, just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, causes excruciating pain...almost as though He were again being whipped - and the wounds again begin to bleed.

In deference to Jewish custom, the Romans return His garments. The heavy patibulum of the cross is tied across His shoulders and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves and the execution detail of the Roman soldiers, headed by a centurion, begins its slow journey along the Via Dolorosa. In spite of His efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden cross together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much. He stumbles and falls. The rough wood of the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tries to rise, but human muscles have been pushed beyond their endurance. The centurion, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selects a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross. Jesus follows, still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock.

Medical Account

The 650 yard journey from the fortress Antonia to Golgotha is finally completed.

The prisoner is again stripped of His clothes - except for a loin cloth which is allowed the Jews.

The crucifixion begins, Jesus is offered wine mixed with Myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refuses to drink. Simon is ordered to place the cross on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backward with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexibility and movement. The patibulum is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes and the titulus reading Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews is nailed in place.

The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The victim is now crucified. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain - the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this wrenching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the the tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

Medical Account

At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by His arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen. It was undoubtedly during these periods that He uttered the seven short sentences which are recorded:

The first, looking down at the Roman soldiers throwing dice for His seamless garment, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

The second, to the penitent thief, Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.

The third, looking down at the terrified, grief stricken, adolescent John, (the beloved Apostle), He said, Behold thy mother, and looking to Mary, His mother, Woman behold thy son.

The fourth cry is from the beginning of the 22nd Psalm, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Medical Account

Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting joint- rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.

Let us remember again the 22nd Psalm (the 14th verse), I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels. It is now almost over - the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level - the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissue - the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to draw in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain.

Jesus gasps His fifth cry, I thirst.

Let us remember another verse from the prophetic 22nd Psalm: My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou has brought me into the dust of death.

A sponge soaked in Posca, the cheap, sour wine which is the staple drink of the Roman legionnaires, is lifted to His lips. He apparently does not take any of the liquid. The body of Jesus is now in extremis and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. This realization brings out His sixth words - possibly little more than a tortured whisper.

Medical Account

It is finished.

His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally He can allow his body to die.

With one last surge of strength, he once again presses His torn feet against the nail, straightens His legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters His seventh and last cry, Father into thy hands I commit my spirit.

The rest you know. In order that the Sabbath not be profaned, the Jews asked that the condemned men be dispatched and removed from the crosses. The common method of ending a crucifixion was by cruxifracture, the breaking of the bones of the legs. This prevents the victim from pushing himself upward; the tension could not be relieved from the muscles of the chest, and rapid suffocation occurred. The legs of the two thieves were broken, but when they came to Jesus they saw that this was unnecessary, thus fulfilling the scripture, not one bone shall be broken.

Apparently to make doubly sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance through the fifth interspace between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart. The 34th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to John: And immediately there came out blood and water. Thus there was an escape of watery fluid from the sac surrounding the heart and blood from the interior of the heart. We, therefore, have rather conclusive post-mortem evidence that Our Lord died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.

Medical Account

Thus we have seen a glimpse of the epitome of evil which man can exhibit toward man - and toward God. This is not a pretty sight and is apt to leave us despondent and depressed. How grateful we can be that we have a sequel: A glimpse of the infinite mercy of God toward man - the miracle of the atonement and the expectation of Easter morning!

