



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**

New Beginnings

Part II

Daily Scripture Readings for
June 29 - July 19

NEW BEGINNINGS WEEK 5: GOING TO CHURCH WITH YOUNG JESUS

Monday, June 29 - Luke 2:41-50

I'll admit I was very tired. We had a 2 year old and an infant at the time and sleep was hard to come by. It was snack time for Hannah, and I could not find the grapes. I looked and I searched and then I finally asked LeeAnn. It was only then that I discovered the problem. I was looking in the pantry instead of the refrigerator.

It's hard to find something or someone when you are searching in the wrong place. Jesus' parents were looking for him for three days to no avail. They finally found him in the Temple. When his parents question him, he speaks for the first time in Luke by saying "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" The searching would have been much shorter if Mary and Joseph had not been looking in the wrong places.

Where are you searching for Jesus? Like Mary and Joseph, this isn't seeking as if you have never had a relationship with Jesus. This is a search for understanding. This is a search that wouldn't take long if you knew where to look. There isn't anything new when it comes to developing your relationship with God. Building this relationship relies on Prayer and Bible Study.

Too often, we are looking for Jesus in the wrong places though. We think we need something more. We think that he needs to be found through more rules (like the Pharisees) or actions (a works-based salvation). When we do think those things, we are searching for Jesus in the wrong place. We are looking for grapes in the pantry. Pray a prayer of confession today if you have been guilty of looking for Jesus in the wrong place. Pray for the opportunity to continue building your relationship with Jesus through Prayer and Bible Study.

Tuesday, June 30 - Deuteronomy 16:1-8

While discussing the New Beginning of Jesus being on the earth this week, I thought it important to remember the reason he and his family went to Jerusalem in Luke 2:41-52. The Passover is a celebration in Judaism to remember God rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. It was required for every Jewish male to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Reading earlier in Luke 2, we know that Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews in their sacrifice made when Jesus was born, so this would have been a yearly tradition for them as faithful followers of the LORD.

At Passover, the people would only eat Unleavened Bread to remember the quickness they had to leave Egypt. On the day they escaped slavery, there wasn't time for the bread to rise, so eating Unleavened Bread during the week of Passover serves as a reminder of that moment.

I believe that these traditions can be helpful in our relationship with God, as long as they don't become the main part of our relationship with God. They can serve as moments to reflect and propel us into Prayer and Bible Study. What traditions do you follow that allow you to grow deeper in your faith? Traditions can be a great tool to help us develop our faith as long as we don't allow following those traditions to be more important than the God they point to.

Wednesday, July 1 - Psalm 24

Our time in the book of Psalms was cut short on Sunday nights earlier this year when we had to stop meeting together for a time. In the month of July and August, we will finish going through the book of Psalms, selecting one or more each week and taking time to discuss as we continue to meet on Facebook. Today, we will spend time on my favorite Psalm. Psalm 24 is a psalm of entrance into the Temple; we might call it a Call to Worship. I don't want my opinion of the Psalm to cloud your reading of it today, so I will save my commentary for tonight. What do you notice in this psalm?

What are the words that are important to you? Reflect on this Psalm today and will discuss it together on Facebook tonight.

Thursday, July 2 - Isaiah 11:1-9

It should be clear to any Christian of whom Isaiah 11:1-9 is speaking. This prophecy comes to fruition through the personhood of Jesus. This person will come from the stump of Jesse, or we might say the family of David. I would like us to focus on verse 2 today. The Messiah's spirit will be the spirit of the LORD and that will be a spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the LORD.

This is the spirit that is inside of Jesus when he is listening, asking questions, and dialoguing with the teachers in the Temple. Luke 2:47 tells us clearly that those who heard twelve year old Jesus were amazed at his understanding (As an aside, this text is a great point to show that Jesus had this wisdom from an early age and did indeed grow in this wisdom, instead of what some have speculated that the spirit of God did not enter Jesus until his baptism).

It is this wisdom and understanding from the LORD that gives Jesus the authority to lead us in our lives. He is a righteous judge and will bring ultimate peace to this earth because of the spirit of God. The peace the world can have because of Jesus is peace unseen since the Garden of Eden. This peace comes from Jesus' unparalleled wisdom. Even the teachers in the Temple were amazed.

It is because of his wisdom, knowledge, righteousness, etc. that Jesus deserves our devotion. We can't go wrong by putting our trust in the Messiah. Trust and Obey. For there's no other way.

Friday, July 3 - Luke 4:43; 9:22; 11:42

At first glance, you might find these to be an odd collection of verses. But I want you to read them in light of the passage of boy Jesus at the Temple. Jesus' first words in Luke are in 2:49: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" There is a sense of purpose in these words and that is the connection point to these other verses in Luke.

Jesus has a very distinct purpose for being on this earth. It's not to please people, even his parents (that's not to say that Jesus was disobedient to his parents or a trouble-maker. But as a parent, I know I would feel frustrated if my child did not come home with me when I said it was time to come home). His purpose is to be about his Father's business. That business is proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). That business is to warn those who are neglecting justice (Luke 11:42). That business is to undergo great suffering and rise again on the third day (Luke 9:22).

What sense of purpose do you have? What work has God asked you to do? All of us should "be about our Father's business," but there is lots of business to take care of. Pray for God to open doors for you this weekend. Pray for God to give you opportunities to do the work of your Father, even if that means not pleasing people. Pray for an opportunity to live out the purpose God has called you to.

Saturday, July 4 - Luke 2:51-52

Haven't you always wanted to know what Jesus was like when he was a child? Certainly, we get this story in Luke 2, but it's the only story we have between Jesus' birth story and Jesus' ministry starting around age 30. The thirst for more stories about Jesus' childhood starting very early on in Christianity. There are several apocryphal (fictional) stories of Jesus as a child written to fill this void. They are clearly fictional accounts because of the "fanciful" way they portray Jesus, but they give the people what they wanted to fill in the gaps left by the four gospels. It would only be speculation

as to why there are not more accounts of Jesus' childhood. It is my opinion that the gospel writers did not feel as if Jesus' childhood was important. It was his ministry that the gospels wanted to focus on. The gospels are very satisfied with skipping over large chunks of Jesus' life in order to proclaim Jesus' purpose on this earth. In fact, Mark, the first gospel written, doesn't even write about Jesus' birth! The two verses you read today encompass about eighteen years of Jesus' life. Again, we can only speculate what actually happened in those two decades.

Luke 2:52 says that Jesus grew in wisdom and age and found favor in the eyes of God and humans. That tells me that he continued to be obedient to God, and he lived a fairly normal life with his family. He lived life as a normal first century Jewish adolescent male (as normal as being without sin and being the Son of God can be).

Let us strive for doing as Jesus did in this period of his life. Let us continue to grow not just in age but wisdom as well. Let us be looked upon with favor by God and man. Let us live our lives like Jesus.

Sunday, July 5 - Psalm 52:8-9

I trust, I will thank, I will proclaim. Seems like three verbs we should live our lives by. Pray today that you will live out a life of trust, thankfulness, and proclamation.

NEW BEGINNINGS WEEK 6 - THE CHURCH ON FIRE

Monday, July 6 - Acts 2:1-13

We could not have a series on New Beginnings without covering Acts 2. This New Beginning begins much like the Original Beginning in Genesis 1. Acts 2 says there was a sound of a violent wind coming from heaven. Genesis 1:2 says there was a wind/spirit over the waters. The wind at the beginning of creation with God (and as we learned from John 1 two weeks ago with the Son as well) is the violent wind rushing

from heaven in Acts 2. It is a wind that comes and sets the church on fire (in a good way!). What you see in Genesis 1 and in Acts 2 is that God is on the move forming this world into a place he can call “good.”

At the end of our passage today, in Acts 2:12, the people who see what has happened to that small group of believers gathered together in one place ask “what is this all about?” This is a question that we should always consider. When we see the Spirit on the move, we should constantly ask “what is going on?” or “what is the Spirit awakening?” These are the questions that help us join the work of the Spirit. These are the questions that guide us to following God’s path. These are the questions that lead us to repentance at the beginning of our spiritual journey with God, and they are the questions that help us grow deeper in our faith throughout our lives. They keep us in tune with what God is doing in this world and remind us to keep working with God in those acts. Today, pray a prayer to God similar to Acts 2:12. Ask God: what does this (current events, things you see) mean? Spend time listening to hear God in his answer to you.

One other recommendation I would make when it comes to answering this question “what does this mean?” Read other Christians points of view as well. One book I have read recently is *God and the Pandemic* by NT Wright. It was a short read, but helped answer this question as it relates to 2020. If you have the means, I would encourage you to order it online (ebook or hardcopy) and give it a read (I’d even enjoy discussing it with you after you’ve completed it. Maybe a Zoom book study is in order?).

Tuesday, July 7 - Acts 2:36-42

The question yesterday was “what does this mean?” The question today is “what do we do now?” Similar questions but the first one is more theoretical and today’s is more practical. After Peter’s sermon in verses 14-35, the hearers in Jerusalem that day ask this question and Peter responds with “repent and be baptized.” And there were 3000 new converts added to the group of Jesus followers. The church was born.

“What do we do now?” is still a relevant question for us to ask 2000 years after the events of Pentecost. It’s a question I feel I ask myself 5 times a day. What do we do now? And I come back to the same answer time after time: the same thing we have been doing just in a different way. When the church was born, they committed themselves to acting in certain ways. You can see those actions in Acts 2:42. The people learned from the Apostles and each other. They shared fellowship with each other. They committed themselves to remembering Jesus’ sacrifice through the taking of the Lord’s Supper, and they offered prayers to God. That is still what the church should be doing. Yes, we still aren’t having fellowship “events,” but fellowship happens when you pick up the phone and have a wonderful conversation with a Christian brother or sister. No, we haven’t had as much in-person Bible Studies, but there are still wonderful ways we can learn from each other while not being within proximity of each other.

“What do we do now?” What we have always done. Pandemics and recessions come and go, but the power of the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God last forever.

Wednesday, July 8 - Psalm 137

I chose this Psalm to study tonight because it can be a psalm of lament we sing and pray today. The people of Israel were distraught that Jerusalem had been destroyed, and these people were exiled to Babylon. Now, they question everything about worshipping God. How can we worship in this place so far from the Temple?

Maybe you felt this way at some point this year. “How can we worship while sitting and watching on the computer? It’s not the same.” You’re right that it is not the same. But God is still the same and deserves our worship. Let’s dive into this Psalm and maybe a few other psalms of lament tonight on Facebook.

Thursday, July 9 - Acts 4:23-31

Our passage today is directly after the first miracle story in the Book of Acts. During the events of Acts 3-4, Peter and John are arrested by officials because of the miracle, but end up being released because the leaders cannot find any wrongdoing. All the officials do is tell them to stop preaching about Jesus. Peter and John return to the believers and tell them this. What I want you to notice is the believers response in verse 29. They do not pray for the persecutions to stop; instead, they pray for boldness to continue to proclaim Jesus no matter what.

There is a powerful understanding of the work of God in the world by praying a prayer like this. God’s work in the world is “normally” contingent on people submitting to God working through them (That’s not to say that God cannot do all things. Of course, he can. What I am saying is that our observations of the world show that God’s work is mostly apparent in God’s people who want to do God’s will). The early church prays for God to be bold inside their lives and proclaim Christ no matter the persecution that is coming. They don’t pray for the persecution to stop; they pray to be light in the darkness.

I believe that is a powerful realization that we can make. Should we pray for the evil in the world to be eradicated? Absolutely. I don’t think a passage like Acts 4 tells us not to do that. However, it shows us that praying for the Holy Spirit to be active in our lives in the face of persecution takes precedence. It is the cooperation between God’s guidance and our obedience that can give us boldness. It is a prayer that no matter what is happening, we will continue to proclaim the message of God to the world.

Let's be frank: persecution of Christians has been going on since Christ's death. People have been praying for the persecution of Christians to stop and it hasn't yet. But at the same time, people have been praying the prayer the church prayed in Acts 4, and those prayers have given Christians (through the Holy Spirit) strength to speak boldly during persecution. Pray for boldness today to speak the message of Christ, the Messiah. Pray for boldness to speak a message of love, hope, healing, and forgiveness through the one and only Son of God.

Friday, July 10 - Acts 17:1-9

We skip along in Acts today to see the founding of the Thessalonian church. This will correspond with tomorrow's reading from 1 Thessalonians, which was written shortly after Paul and Silas founded the church here in Acts 17. Persecution is continuing, but the Holy Spirit is continuing to work as well. The results in Thessalonica were mixed. Paul's explanation of the Old Testament being fulfilled in Christ was accepted by some and denied by others. Gentile God-fearers and Jewish women are singled out as groups who more readily accepted the message Paul was preaching.

I do find this passage informative for the way we should proclaim Jesus. While Paul is in the synagogue, speaking to people who have an understanding of the Old Testament, he uses the Scriptures to prove Jesus is the awaited Messiah. Even then, some don't accept the message. Later in Acts 17, Paul is in Athens and doesn't use Scripture but Greek mythology and Athenian life to "prove" who Jesus is. In this magnificent sermon, only a few accept it as Truth. This tells me that we need to craft the message of Christ toward the people who are listening. Even when we follow the Spirit's guidance and are successful as Paul is in Thessalonica and Athens, there will be some who don't accept the message. That is an individual decision we cannot force upon people. We are successful when we proclaim the message as the Spirit guides us, and then the response is out of our control.

In the middle of Paul's journey to Thessalonica and Athens is a stop in Beroea. Paul does the same thing he does in Thessalonica, but the people are more responsive (Acts 17:11). What is the cause of better receptivity? It doesn't say. We cannot know why some accept and some don't. It is not our mission for people *to accept* Christ. It is our mission *to tell people* about Christ. Paul is successful in this mission in Thessalonica, Beroea, and Athens, even if the response in Thessalonica and Athens is mixed.

Let this be a reminder to all of us: even if the response to our proclamation is not acceptance of the Truth of Christ, you are successful if you proclaim the message through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is the goal. If you do that in your life, you are successful. If you have not, let today be the day when you have success.

Saturday, July 11 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Today, we read a wonderful passage where we could discuss lots of different points. What I want us to understand is the principle of encouragement. While this passage does discuss the coming of the Lord, it is my belief that Paul is speaking about this in order to encourage the believers. The passage encourages those who have lost friends and family members that they will be part of the reunion with Christ when he returns. It encourages the people to remember that they are light and should not be frightened when the Lord returns like a "thief in the night." The passage encourages the church to build one another up, help each other stay alert and stay awake.

How can we encourage one another today? How can we build one another up? Proverbs 27:17 says "as iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another." I think this is one way we can encourage one another. What can you do today to encourage someone? How can you build someone up instead of tearing them

down? How can you build a relationship with other like-minded Christians to sharpen each other?

Sunday, July 12 - Psalm 54:4

God is one who helps you in your daily life. Worship the one who helps and keeps you alive!

NEW BEGINNINGS WEEK 7 - HE'S COMING BACK!

Monday, July 13 - Revelation 1:1-3

When one reads a book (Bible book or any book), the first few sections are extremely important. Those pages or verses are going to tell you a lot about the whole book. Do not skip over them!

In the category of skipping over beginnings of books, Revelation 1 gets skipped over regularly. The first three verses get skipped over even if someone does study Revelation 1. Revelation 2-3 are the Letters to the Seven Churches. Revelation 4-22 is the remainder of the book focusing on John's Apocalyptic Visions of trials, tribulations, and triumph. Those are the sections that get studied. But you will always lose sight of the main purpose of Revelation if you skip Revelation 1:1-3.

Revelation is "the revelation of Jesus Christ." If you miss this in Revelation, you miss the forest for the trees. One gets so caught up in what this object means and what that number means in Revelation that we forget the whole purpose. Revelation is not a book that is only applicable to people looking to figure out when the end is. If that's all Revelation is to you, you've missed the point. Jesus tells us "about the day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt. 24:36).

These first verses give us the main point of Revelation and show us what should be important during difficult days. Revelation is the revelation of Jesus. It reveals to all Christians the Jesus who will return. It tells people who are facing uncertainty and persecution that better days are ahead and not to lose their faith. That's the message of Revelation. Stay firm in your faith. The time is near. We are in the last days (and have been since Jesus ascended to heaven the first time).

Tuesday, July 14 - Revelation 3:14-22

This letter to Laodicea is probably the one people are familiar with most. This is the lukewarm Christian letter. I'm not sure how you have heard these verses preached, but I always heard them as "be all-in or all-out. Don't be on the fence." And I'm not so sure that's the correct statement.

There are appropriate usages of hot and cold water. Lukewarm is neither. I don't think the letter is saying lukewarm is "on the fence." I think it is saying that lukewarm is worthless. It's the worst of the worst. The church in Laodicea isn't doing anything worthwhile, and they think they are blessed because they are rich. God is telling them through the letter that they are poorer than poor and are worthless lukewarm water. Blech.

Instead, these people (along with the other recipients of the letters and us today) are called to be conquerors. Repent of the attitudes, thoughts, desires, and actions you are committing and instead follow through in your commitment to God. No matter what is happening, no matter your earthly success or failure, stay on the right path and be conquerors. As it says in Rev. 21:7 "those who *conquer* will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children."

As Christians, we are conquerors. Stay strong and keep the faith. The best days are ahead of us.

Wednesday, July 15 - Psalm 88

Psalm 88, along with Psalm 89, are refreshingly incomplete. What I mean by that is they don't end like Psalms typically end or how we are taught to end our prayers. Both of these Psalms are more matter-of-fact. They explain the situation, cry out in anguish and hurt, and just end. There isn't a return to "I trust in you" or "great is your faithfulness."

Honest feelings are encouraged. Sometimes we are in such a deep time of sorrow that rays of sunlight are just not seen. I want us to look deep into these Psalms tonight (mainly Psalm 88) and hear the anguish in the Psalms. We will also talk about our own anguish and loss that leads to these types of feelings. Hope you will join us on Facebook tonight.

Thursday, July 16 - Revelation 4:1-11

As I mentioned on Monday, sometimes we lose sight of the purpose of Revelation because we end up being too focused on small things and miss the big picture. I missed this until recently. Revelation 4 is the beginning of the vision section of Revelation and look how it starts. It starts in worship. Elsewhere in Revelation, when the violence and destruction get worse and worse, there ends up being a section to take a break and worship (see Rev. 8:1-4; Rev. 11:15-19; Rev. 19:1-10).

What can this all mean for us? No matter how awful the world gets, no matter how difficult life becomes for authentic men and women of God, no matter the violence seen on this earth, we must always come to the altar and worship God. Worshipping God is the event we should organize our lives around. We should worship God at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. That type of commitment is what it will take to be conquerors to the end.

Friday, July 17 - Revelation 21:1-8

And...we skip over everything (did you think we could really read all of Revelation in one week?). Death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more when God makes his home among us. When New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, all things will be new and I can imagine God uttering the words from Genesis 1, when at the end of each day, "God saw that it was good."

I've thought about this passage a lot lately. This year has been one where mourning, crying, pain, and death seem to be surrounding us more than usual. This year has been one where I have felt what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 22:11 "do not be far from me [Lord], for trouble is near and there is no one to help." I have been so distraught and mournful at the state of the world in the year 2020. I have been broken as I have seen how people treat one another in a time of uncertainty. It leads me to call out to the Lord to be close because trouble is close and we have no other protection.

I have hope for the future when Christ returns. I look forward to a world where the sea is no more, meaning evil has been eradicated. I pray for the day when crying and pain is gone. And until that day, I will pray for God to remain close by my side.

Saturday, July 18 - Revelation 22:1-7

The day before I am writing this entry, Micah got a new watch, his first watch in fact. As he was going to bed, he kept looking out the window hoping that it would be morning. If the sun was rising, then he could wake up and wear his watch again. He was sad several times when he looked out the window and it was still nighttime. The understanding that Micah had was that sunlight means he can have fun again. He can wake up and play.

That's how I view Rev. 22:5. There is no more night. There is no more down time. Our time with God is forever, and it is forever exciting and awesome. You might even

say it is fun and playful. Some of our hymns say this very well. Like the last stanza of Amazing Grace:

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.*

Doesn't that get you excited!

In a way, I'm a lot like Micah in this respect. I keep looking out the window, and I get sad that it is still nighttime. That there is still death, mourning, crying, and pain as we discussed in yesterday's devotion. I'm distraught that it is still night, and the darkness seems to be overcoming the world. I'm looking for the light and it's hard to see.

But I hold on to the promise that Rev. 22:5 will come soon. I live in expectation of Jesus' return whether it actually happens in my lifetime or not. I hold on to the promise where John says in another of his writings that "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all."

While I wait on God's light to extinguish the darkness forever, I hope to be a light to the world. "This little light of mine. I'm gonna let it shine."

Sunday, July 19 - Psalm 55:22

This verse reminds me of 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him; he cares for you!" God will sustain you. Join with fellow believers and worship your Sustainer and Lord this morning.