

**Jesus**

**Mon, Apr 19, 2021 - Remember This**

Some of us are good at remembering things. Others of us may have trouble remembering many things. And while there are some things that it really doesn’t matter if you remember, other things are important to remember because they will benefit us in the future.

**Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”** (Matthew 14:25-31, NIV)

Most of us have read many (or all) of the Bible stories of miraculous things Jesus did. We have probably heard stories from people we know (or know about) telling how Jesus did something incredible in their lives. And we may even have experienced amazing things Jesus did in our lives.

But too often we forget. We forget how He worked in the past and we forget that He is working in the present. Thus it’s easy for us to drift into doubt that causes us to question if Jesus is really with us, if He understands what we’re going through, or if He really cares. In those times Jesus might ask us, like He did Peter, “Why did you doubt?” To be sure, Jesus doesn’t always work the same way this time as He did last time. He doesn’t do for us exactly as He’s done for others. But He is always with us. He always cares about us. He always wants the best for us. And He’s always working for our good.

What can you do to develop your memory (of what Jesus has done)? How could unwavering faith in Jesus help you in some things you are facing? What will you do about it?

*The most important lesson that I have learned is to trust God in every circumstance. Lots of times we go through different trials and following God's plan seems like it doesn't make any sense at all. God is always in control and he will never leave us.* (Allyson Felix)

**Tue, Apr 20 - Strength For You**

We might be skeptical when people try to convince us that they are honest, faithful, kind, or some other quality. Often that’s because we have seen people whose actions or lifestyle contradict what they say. Perhaps this is why Jesus asked questions and told stories to emphasize certain things about Himself.

**[Jesus] knew their thoughts, so he said, “Any kingdom divided by civil war is doomed. A family splintered by feuding will fall apart. You say I am empowered by Satan. But if Satan is divided and fighting against himself, how can his kingdom survive? And if I am empowered by Satan, what about your own exorcists? They cast out demons, too, so they will condemn you for what you have said. But if I am casting out demons by the power of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you. For when a strong man is fully armed and guards his palace, his possessions are safe--until someone even stronger attacks and overpowers him, strips him of his weapons, and carries off his belongings.** (Luke 11:17-22, NLT)

Jesus had been casting out demons from people, which brought criticism from some Jewish leaders. (They claimed Satan gave Him the power to get rid of demons.) Jesus didn’t come out and claim He was strong. But in His illustration of a “strong man” and “someone even stronger” He was emphasizing His strength, which is more powerful than that of Satan. Jesus came to rescue us from the power of sin and the power of Satan. When you face temptation or you are in a place where you are powerless to change things, you can trust that Jesus has the strength you need to get through the situation. How can this help you today?

*He who stands upon his own strength will never stand.* (Thomas Brooks)

**Wed, Apr 21 - Where Do You Go?**

All of us have questions. Our questions may be about life, God, self, suffering, or something else. You may never have thought about your questions, but often we experience events where our questions come to the forefront. And if we seek answers to our questions (in the right place) it can be a turning point in our lives.

**There was a man named Nicodemus who was one of the Pharisees and an important Jewish leader. One night Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we know you are a teacher sent from God, because no one can do the miracles you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot be in God’s kingdom.” Nicodemus said, “But if a person is already old, how can he be born again? He cannot enter his mother’s womb again. So how can a person be born a second time?” But Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born from water and the Spirit, you cannot enter God’s kingdom.** (John 3:1-5, NCV)

Everyone has questions about God. And the best place anyone can go with these questions is to God Himself. In the first century an important religious leader named Nicodemus had some questions. He came to Jesus in the safety of darkness, perhaps because he didn’t want his Jewish colleagues to know about his visit and potentially ostracize him. Nicodemus had seen and heard some amazing things from Jesus, like everyone else in Jerusalem, and even though he had questions he knew there was something special about Jesus. But Jesus saw through the man’s small talk and made a statement that created even more questions for Nicodemus. At the end of their discussion it’s hard to know if anything had been settled for Nicodemus, but he evidently continued to wrestle with what Jesus said to him because he appears again in John 7:49-51 (when defended Jesus in front of his powerful Jewish colleagues) and in John 19:38-40 (when he publicly secured permission to take Jesus’ body and helped prepare Him for burial).

How do you deal with your questions? Where do you go? Jesus wants us to come to Him because He has the words we need to hear, even though it may not the answer we were expecting or wanted to hear. Will you spend some time today talking to the Lord (and listening for His response) about your questions?

*I have learned that faith means trusting in advance what will only make sense in reverse.* (Philip Yancey)

**Thur, Apr 22 - Offending**

Who are some of the most religious persons you know? How would you describe them? Some religious people are big on following the rules. Often they are proud of their rule-keeping and look down on those who don’t follow those same rules.

**Later when Jesus was eating supper at Matthew’s house with his close followers, a lot of disreputable characters came and joined them. When the Pharisees saw him keeping this kind of company, they had a fit, and lit into Jesus’ followers. “What kind of example is this from your Teacher, acting cozy with crooks and riffraff?” Jesus, overhearing, shot back, “Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? Go figure out what this Scripture means: ‘I’m after mercy, not religion.’ I’m here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders.”** (Matthew 9:10-13, MSG)

In Jesus’ time the Jewish religious leaders (Pharisees) were highly religious. They made a big deal about the laws in Scripture. They had identified 613 laws (rules) and they thought God cared more about them because they worked diligently at keeping all of the rules. But some of the strongest criticisms Jesus ever leveled were spoken to the Jewish religious leaders. In their efforts to keep the religious laws they completely missed God’s will, and they completely missed God.

Jesus often offended the religious people who cared more about rules then they did about people. Jesus, on the other hand, cared about people--those who were not healthy because of the consequences of sin. The Jewish religious leaders considered these people “outsiders,” but Jesus ate with them, accepted them, and invited them into His family.

Jesus wants people to follow God’s ways. And Jesus’ example--showing love to God and others--is the one we should follow. How can you be more like Jesus?

*When Jesus came to earth, demons recognized him, the sick flocked to him, and sinners doused his feet and head with perfume. Meanwhile he offended pious Jews with their strict preconceptions of what God should be like. Their rejection makes me wonder, could religious types be doing just the reverse now? Could we be perpetuating an image of Jesus that fits our pious expectations but does not match the person portrayed so vividly in the Gospels?* (Philip Yancey)

**Fri, Apr 23 - The Value of Others**

When has someone tried to help you to get back on the right path in life or to continue on the right way when you were struggling or ready to quit? How did you respond to that person? Why do you think so many people often push back against the efforts of a friend in those situations?

**“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.”** (Luke 22:31-32, NLT)

Following Christ is not easy. When we follow Him we are going against the grain of our human nature and against the grain of our society. We also have an enemy who works against us--not only does he bait us to do the wrong things, but also he works to keep us from trusting and following what God says in His Word, the Bible. This is why it’s so important for us to develop relationships with other believers who can encourage and help us keep progressing on the Jesus way.

Jesus knew (Simon) Peter would turn away from Him in a difficult time. But Jesus also knew Peter would later be restored in his faith. Thus Jesus gave Peter a command: “strengthen your brothers.” This could only happen through relationships--in connection with other believers.

Jesus’ words weren’t just for Peter. They are for us as well. It’s through relationships that we can be strengthened by others and can help strengthen others. Other people are essential to our spiritual journey. God designed us for relationship, and He designed the church as the place to develop vital relationships to help grow our faith. So how are your relationships with other believers? What will you do today to strengthen them?

*You can try, but you can't live life well on your own. We all need other people--to walk with us, to work with us, and to watch out for us.* (Rick Warren)