

Christ Alone

“They Saw No One Except
Jesus Himself Alone”



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Christ Alone

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Page

		<i>Prologue & Introduction</i>	i
1	Matt. 17:1-13	<i>A Singular Grace - "They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"</i>	1
2	John 12:20-50	<i>A Thirsting Grace - "Sir, We Wish to See Jesus"</i>	7
3	Luke 10:38-42	<i>A Listening Grace - "Only One Thing is Necessary"</i>	9
4	Luke 7:36-50	<i>An Adoring Grace - "But She Has Not Ceased to Kiss My Feet"</i>	12
5	Matt. 3:7-12	<i>An Unworthy Grace - "I Am Not Fit to Remove His Sandals"</i>	15
6	Mark 15:42-46	<i>A Courageous Grace - "He Gathered Up Courage and Asked for the Body of Jesus"</i>	18
7	Mark 12:41-44	<i>A Sacrificial Grace - "She Put in All She Owned"</i>	22
		<i>A Final Word</i>	27

A Short Prologue

Everyone wants more than what they have, exist in any other context than where they are at, and feel differently than what they do. These short readings on *Christ Alone* are a response to this cry. May it please the Father to open our eyes to see that Jesus is enough for this life and for the life to come.

An Introduction

Religiosity rings hollow when struck by the hammer of God's truth. Yet we all desire to appear better than we are. We speak of spirituality as if it were a commodity bought and traded. We play with God as one would play with cards or shoot marbles on the childhood playgrounds of bygone days.

Spirituality is not merited or gained; it is given and received. God gives, man receives. The deception of a performance-based acceptance breeds the virus of hypocrisy, mask wearing, and a stifling, gasping, wheezing, protracted painful death.

The New Testament shows us something different. We see this in a scenario of contrasts. It happened during the days of grace and truth when a skewed perspective caused the Law of God to become something it was never meant to be (Hos. 8:12; Ps. 19:10). Religious rulers, spiritual mercenaries and otherworldly marketers sought to pawn off idols and empty cisterns for the well-springs of God's thirst quenching grace.

It is within the context of misguided desire that the downtrodden and outcast become images and heroes of grace whose acts of valor in the war against the unreal become noted and renowned.

Grace produces in and through the people of God a lifestyle that would appear radical to the religious. **Yet normal Christianity is radical.** The New Testament record is filled with portraits of mind-renewing and life-transforming encounters with Jesus Christ.

In 1942 the Coca-Cola company used the slogan, "It's the real thing" to promote its product. The idea was that all other colas when compared with Coca-Cola were less than genuine. They were imitations. As always, our propensity toward check lists, formulas, and keys to success makes us believe imitation produces reality; but to imitate is still an imitation. The stories of grace and their expressions are not placed in Holy Writ in order for us to imitate but for us to celebrate and marvel at the abundance of God's lavish grace. So, as we read these short studies, may God enable us to sit back, meditate on Him, and marvel at His grace.

Jesus Christ is still changing lives and this is . . . radical.

One more thing . . .

We have confused being spiritual with spirituality. The two are not the same. Being spiritual is to be saved. The statements in Scripture that refer to being spiritual in First Corinthians 2, Romans 8, and Galatians 5 all refer to the believer in contrast to the unbeliever. All believers are spiritual. However, spirituality is different than being spiritual. Spirituality is the outworking of being spiritual. Spirituality can be a synonym for fruit bearing, obedience,

and good works. Like fruit bearing, spirituality is not something we do but rather something being done in us and through us by God and by God alone. Spirituality is not a measurable commodity. We do not judge spirituality; we enjoy spirituality. The line between spirituality and religiosity is thin. The space between spirituality and hypocrisy is even thinner. So be cautioned. To try is to fail; to rest is to celebrate the sufficiency of God's provision in and through the second and third members of the Godhead.

So . . . enjoy and keep your eyes on Him who is both the beginner and finisher of your faith (Heb. 12:2).

An afterthought . . . the stories we are considering in this short series are pure and simple. They are not cluttered by the grandiose or spectacular. They are simple statements of pure devotion. Nothing is done to gain or to receive. They simply give. But in giving, they gain. The investment of man reaps the dividends of God. It is an unfair exchange, but man sits as the beneficiary of God's unbalanced justice. The New Testament word for this awkward exchange is grace. Perhaps God will visit us with such pure and simple devotion. Oh may we see the richness of Christ, may the vision of Him be so compelling as to open our hands and move our hearts to loving Him.

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”



*“And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.”
(Matt. 17:8)*

Read Matthew 17:1-13 — A Singular Grace

We live in a time when distractions have become primary and the important has become secondary. Just because we can, we do. Everything about the present is super-sized, immediate, convenient, and . . . empty. We have settled for the good and have left the best in its wake. Yet such buying without paying has left us bankrupt. This bankruptcy is no more glaring than in the showcase of our souls and in the depth of our relationships. We have an expression for it, “A mile wide and an inch deep.” The greater tragedy is the impact this has had on our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Although we have knowledge of who He is and give intellectual assent to that knowledge, the reality of this information is no more life altering than Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Without seeking to be harsh for shock value, the evidence against us is staggering. Instead of having possessions, we are possessed. Instead of enjoying the journey, we rush toward the destiny. Instead of community, we isolate ourselves through technology and autonomy. We struggle to feel, to see, to hear, to taste, to smell, to know, hence ... to live.

Life's substance is
rooted in a person
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King of kings and Lord
of lords.

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

Living is not defined by what we possess, or by the comfort we experience, or by the sorrow and sadness we avoid. Life's marrow, its essence, the juice that sustains, its nourishing source, its very substance is rooted in a person and His name is Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords. It is only as we are firmly planted in the soil of who He is and what He has done that the plant of our life can bloom. Jesus said it this way, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and *have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). The life Jesus describes is a life marked by superabundance. Tragically, modern Christianity has defined blessing by the number of gifts accumulated as opposed to the richness of the gift giver. Abundant life is life in the Son. There is nothing fancy or flashy about such a life, but it contains "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God [which] leave His judgments unsearchable and His ways unfathomable" (Rom. 11:33). Such a life is consumed by His love for us. The strength of the life is not found in one's love for Him, but in "comprehending with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:18, 19). The emphasis is not on our love for Him, but rather on His love for us (1 John 4:10). This is the strength of life. It is a life that sees Him and only Him. We can surround ourselves by all things good but in so doing block our vision of Him who is best. He is the substance that casts the shadows of life (Col. 2:16-23).

It is the desire of this short study to call the people of God back to the best. As Scripture is studied, we will hear its singular voice and theme. Our quest is to see "No one except Jesus Himself alone." We will begin with Matthew 17:8. To understand Matthew 17:8 one needs to see the

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

larger context of the entire paragraph and then the preceding chapter.

In chapter 16:13-20 we find our Lord in Caesarea Philippi. While there He asked His disciples a question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The responses showed the wide range of opinion concerning His ministry: "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." What is of interest is the responses show a degree of biblical awareness. There is a certain validity to what the populace was saying. Yet, every response, though respectable, fell woefully short and thus was lacking and deficient.

Our Lord then states the question once more, but points it directly at the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter's statement is stellar and direct, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord's following comment points to the revelatory nature of the statement, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

The significance of this event becomes even more dramatic as the narrative unfolds in verses 21-28. For the very first time our Lord will disclose to His disciples His impending death. Included in this announcement is the certainty of His resurrection. Yet, such thinking for the disciples was alien and impenetrable. The thought of our Lord's death was so repugnant to the disciples that Peter rebuked the Lord Himself. The power of His approaching death becomes evident when Jesus rebukes Peter by saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." The cross-work of our Lord crashes against the foreboding walls of

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

darkness. It is a twisted whirlwind of unprecedented ideology. An incarnation of deity, the death of the God-man, one dying for those who hate Him . . . such thinking is unparalleled. Such speech is without equal and such actions as these are without prior pattern. Yet, it is the mind of God and His good pleasure to do as He has willed that is being played out. Anything other than this is satanic, demonic, devilish, evil, human, and worldly.

A full disclosure of what faced the disciples becomes even more apparent in verses 24 and following. Herein is the secret to the Christian life. Jesus tells His disciples, "Not only must I die if you would be saved, but so must you." It is only in dying that we live. It is only in giving that we get. It is only in serving that we are masters. And it is only as we follow Christ, we become Christian. And it is only as we follow Christ that we become Christians.

It is only in dying, we live. It is only in giving, we get. It is only in serving, we are masters. And it is only as we follow Christ, we become Christian.

Six days after the events of Caesarea Philippi we find Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. Most recognize these three as our Lord's inner circle. It is on this mountain of disclosure that Moses and Elijah appear with our Lord. Nothing is said of them, but of Him much is made. The text tells us that "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." I personally believe the disciples were granted a glimpse of our Lord's pre-incarnate state. His deity radiated through His humanity. The sight was mind-altering and life-transforming. They then heard the divine affirmation of validity, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

The response by the disciples is understandable and predictable, "They fell face down to the ground and were terrified." Our Lord's response is likewise predictable, "Get up, and do not be afraid." Often throughout the Gospels Jesus calls His disciples to have faith and not to fear (Matt. 8:26; Mark 4:40). The story continues with a simple statement, "And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone." This narrative invites us to ask a simple question, "Why was there this disclosure to these three disciples?" Fundamentally, the Mount of Transfiguration was a confirmation by God the Father of His Son's readiness. All things were now ready for the Lamb of God to die. His nature guarantees the sufficiency of the offering for the propitiation of God's wrath and the redemption of man's sin.

But there is another side to all of this. Those who would follow Jesus were invited to die, to sacrifice what they knew for that which awaited them. They were asked to simply believe, to have faith, faith in things hoped for and in things not seen (Heb. 11:1). The weight of this task appeared overwhelming. What guarantee did they have that what was promised would truly come to pass? Part of the answer would appear to be found on this Mount of Transfiguration. They saw Him in His glory. It was but a glimpse, but a glimpse none-the-less. And when everything paused, the only thing they saw was Him.

Ultimately, the question needing to be asked is rather stark. Its barrenness or rather its potency

The question that bows the head of His people is only this, "Is Jesus enough or do we need more?"

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

shames us. The question that bows the head of His people is only this, "Is Jesus enough or do we need more?"

Our lives belie the integrity and strength of our answer. We are perhaps no different than King Saul when asked of Samuel the prophet, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (1 Sam. 15:14). If Jesus is enough, then why do we have all this clutter in our lives? No one is unscathed by the searing nature of the question and the sobering revelation of our answer, but let us not despair. Our acceptance before the Father has never been based on our performance, only our position. He loves us despite our silly affection for mere trinkets. But let us heed this call. Let us seek the best, the better, the eternally satisfying sufficiency of the Giver's greatest gift given in the person of His Son. Let us embrace Him. Let us bow before Him with an eternal allegiance pledged. Let us "Lift up our eyes, and see no one except Jesus Himself alone."

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

“Sir, We Wish to See Jesus”

2

*“These then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee,
and began to ask him, saying,
‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’” (John 12:21)*

Read John 12:20-50 — A Thirsty Grace

How do we remove the scales from our eyes? How is it possible to see so clearly that the temporal gives way to the eternal? Is it possible to live so singularly for the world to come that one is able to enjoy this life and truly live?

Our story in John 12:20 and following is intriguing. Verse 12 tells us the event occurs after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The response was so overwhelming by the common people that the Pharisees, in complete frustration, exclaimed, “the world has gone after Him” (v. 19). With this as our backdrop we now enter into the thoughts of verses 20 and following.

Verse 20 tells us the people asking the question were Greeks. Apparently they were proselytes, Gentiles who had converted to the Jewish faith. If they were not true proselytes, they were at least religious seekers. They came to Philip.

Their request was direct and concise, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Nothing more is recorded. Why did they ask? What were they hoping to gain by simply seeing Him? Were they seeking an audience? Did they wish to speak with Him? Were they desirous of Him to heal a friend or perhaps their own physical maladies? The text does not provide for us any information other than, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

What follows is a paragraph of contrasts between those who would believe on Him and those who would reject Him. The light of belief is set against the backdrop of dark unbelief. God is to receive glory and some among the unbelieving would seek to rob Him of what is rightfully His.

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” “Just a glimpse that is all I ask. If I can but touch the hem of His garment, to hear Him call my name, to feel His touch caressing my brokenness . . . that is all I desire. Just point me to Him.”

Nothing further is said concerning these Greeks. There is no further commentary as to whether or not they saw Jesus. I am of the mind to believe those who ask, receive and those who seek, find and those who knock, to them the door is opened (Matt. 7:7). I am of the mind to believe that the thirsty soul is quenched (John 4:13, 14) and the hungry leave satisfied (John 6:35).

Perhaps today you and I need to make a simple request, “I wish to see Jesus.” Let us believe God is ready to open our eyes to who He is, what He has done, and who we are in Him (Eph. 1:18). Let us believe God delights in satisfying our innermost longings for Him.

Let us believe that God delights in satisfying our innermost longings for Him.
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“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

“Only One Thing is Necessary”

3

“But only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42)

Read Luke 10:38-42 — A Listening Grace

This is one of the most pointed passages in the Word of God as it relates to working versus worshipping. Pagan theology works for God, believing through such efforts God is pleased and thus dispenses favor proportionate to the amount of effort exerted. Pagan theology knows nothing of grace and of rest. To trust and believe is tantamount to assigning the individual to condemnation and hell. There can be no rest for there is no finish.

It is a tragedy that has visited and continues to visit the world of Christendom. We have allowed ourselves to believe that God does need us and without our effort nothing of value can be accomplished on earth. We have so skewed God and biblical worship that many of us side with Martha and view Mary as having a free loading non-productive welfare state faith. Yet the passage is intentional. Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His word (v. 39). She had *a listening grace*. Martha's distraction is set against Mary's ease of presence. Martha wrestled and Mary rested. The word “distracted” in verse 40 speaks of dragging a burden, of being twisted by anxiety. Our Lord notes this in verse 41 when he comments on Martha being worried and bothered. Martha's struggle manifested itself in her face and body language. Her statements to our Lord communicate the idea that she pounced on Him (v. 40). She charged Him

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

with wrong doing. Her agitation blinded her to the inappropriateness of her actions. She was put out by Mary's advantage and the Lord's insensitivity to the situation at hand.

There is a danger in serving our Lord from a motive that lacks purity. If we serve for merit, we have gained nothing. If we serve from love, we lose nothing (1 Cor. 13).

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Our Lord's response to Martha overflows with pathos. Can you not hear it, "Martha, Martha?" There is deep tenderness in His voice. He speaks her name, "Martha, Martha." The issue was

not about the Lord, but about Martha's perspective and priority. She perhaps thought that through her actions God would love her more or be more approving of this "willing and humble" servant. Yet, God's love for and approval of either one was not rooted in their actions, but His grace. He did not accept them because of their actions, but because of His. He did not approve of them because of their actions, but because of His.

Our Lord establishes precedence in this small paragraph. "Only one thing is necessary." Only one thing. Not these ten things, but this one thing. How many times do we find ourselves overextended spiritually, financially, physically, and emotionally? How many times do we find ourselves trying to live 25 hour days? How many times do we clutter the simplicity of Christianity with rituals and laws? Yet how many times have we laid hold of "this one thing?" When was the last time we simply sat at the feet of Jesus? Sat and listened to Him? What Martha did was not bad, but it was

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

only good and her good took the place of the best. And because the good had replaced the best, the good became the eternal enemy of the best.

There is hidden within the text an interesting thought. In verse 39 the Greek text suggests that Martha also was prone to sit at the feet of Jesus. Martha was a Mary but became distracted by the good and robbed herself of the best. Many of us have started well but because of "the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter[ing] in, [the Word is choked], and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19).

Many of us started out as a Mary and through time have ended up like Martha. Let us not forget that the yoke Christ invites us to carry is easy and light (Matt. 11:28-30) and that His work against sin is finished (John 19:30). Perhaps today God will give us *a listening grace*.

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

4

“But She Has Not Ceased to Kiss My Feet”

"You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet." (Luke 7:45)

Read Luke 7:36-50 — An Adoring Grace

Uncomfortable . . . that is how those present felt. The Pharisee's name was Simon (this is not Simon Peter). As a Pharisee he was maligned and misunderstood, much like the modern image of a historic Puritan. The Pharisees are often the object of ridicule and misrepresentation. They were, however, pious men who sincerely desired to keep the Law and follow God but had become entangled in a web of their own making and could not free themselves from their self-imposed sentence. They were blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 15:14). They were barred and barred others from entering (Luke 11:52). None but God can judge Simon's motives. Why did he invite Jesus in? Was he a seeker? Was he merely curious? Did he think people would envy him for having Jesus in his home? Whatever his motive, the event went in a direction he had not anticipated.

Uncomfortable . . . this singular act of gratitude and devotion collapsed the walls of comfort, convention, and convenience. Acts like these expose the hypocrisy of mere profession. You can hear the crumbling of walls when Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15 [this is Simon Peter]).

Verse 37 identifies the woman as "a sinner." Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus is the

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

friend of sinners (Luke 7:34). Jesus put this woman at ease, something she had not felt in a long time. She sensed in Jesus love without condition, acceptance without requirement, forgiveness without limit, favor without merit, and service without reward. She loved Jesus. Her whorish defilement seemed unimportant when in the presence of Him. There was no lust in His eyes. He was there to get nothing, but to give everything. This was not the first time she had seen Him or heard of His actions. She was safe in His presence.

The burden she bore was released. The stain she felt was removed. The despair that consumed her was lifted. For the first time she was alive and whole.

She did the one thing natural to her. She served. She carried out the custom of her time by washing the feet of the guest. Yet, what she did was unusual. First, it was not her responsibility. It was the responsibility of the host family. Second, in place of water, she used her tears. No picture of tenderness could have been greater. Third, instead of a towel or piece of garment, she dried His feet with her hair. Fourth, she kissed His feet continuously as an act of devotion. And finally, she anointed His feet with perfume as an act of adoration. What she had once used in the plying of her trade, she now brings as an offering of repentance and abandonment.

Uncomfortable . . . humph! Who does He think He is, “If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.”

In the absence of humility comes hypocrisy.

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

In the absence of humility comes hypocrisy. The hypocrite is reluctant to forsake the high ground of self-deception knowing not his tenuous condition. It is the Pharisee who should have responded in kind but, instead, the act of adoration comes from “a sinner.”

Why did the sinner adore Him? In the story that follows (vv. 40-50) He makes application and then poses a question, “When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?”

Although both the Pharisee and the sinner’s condition were the same, only one recognized their need (Luke 18:9-14). The application was direct and immediate. Where one would have hoped for repentance, only pride was manifested. Our Lord forgives the sinner and the Pharisees respond with challenge, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?”

Only the sinner left justified. Lest we fail to embrace the larger theological picture, she was justified long before our Lord pronounced it. The sinner manifested *an adoring grace*. An adoring grace is shameless. Adoring grace does not worry about what others might think, only that it can worship. Adoring grace forgets protocol and loses itself in the moment. Adoring grace sees only Jesus. There is no gain to be made in an adoring grace. It exists to give worship. May it please our heavenly Father to grant to us His people the power of an adoring grace.

Adoring grace sees only Jesus.

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

“I am Not Fit to Remove His Sandals”



"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matt. 3:11)

Read Matthew 3:7-12 — An Unworthy Grace

“I am not fit to remove His sandals.” This is where it begins and must begin. Until we see ourselves as being unfit to even loosen the straps of our Lord’s sandals, we will never have an accurate understanding of who He is and who we are in contrast to Him. He is God . . . we are not. In the ease of the statement lies the mystery of creation. This is unworthy grace.

The context in which the statement is made is one of pairs: Pharisees and Sadducees, vipers and wrath, fruit and repentance, Abraham and stones, baptize and Holy Spirit, threshing floor and unquenchable fire.

John’s words speak of a judgment that is dark and foreboding. It looms like an imminent storm — threatening, unsettling, and disquieting. Can any expect exemption? Who is worthy to escape this sweeping, inclusive judgment? Even I, the predicted forerunner, am not worthy to remove His sandals, how will I . . . even I . . . find immunity?

Perhaps one of the most interesting scenarios in Scripture is the contradiction of inclusion and exclusion.

It is the harlots and sinners who will precede the religious into heaven’s land (Matt. 21:31; Luke 7:29, 30). Why is this

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

so? It is so because those who think they are worthy, are not, and those who know they are not worthy, are (see further 1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Jesus put it this way in Matthew 9:12 and 13, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for **I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**"

Those who believe themselves to be worthy are not worthy. This upside-down thinking changes everything. Those who are first will be last and the last first (Luke 13:30). The one who chooses the best seat for himself will be displaced (Luke 14:8-10).

Unworthy grace is the only kind of grace that exists.

Unworthy grace is the only kind of grace that exists. Nothing we have we deserve. God in His mercy gives us what we do not deserve and withholds from us that which we do deserve. It is only as we see ourselves as unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10), that we have clearly seen our own unworthiness.

For us to claim merit or inheritance or rights or status or anything else outside of Christ is foolish. For us to make such claims in Christ must be marked by a deep sense of gratitude and unworthiness. I am a son and a joint-heir, but I must not deceive myself into thinking that I deserve it.

In the absence of grace, darkness consumes me. In the absence of grace, the wrath of God abides on me. Ah, but grace . . . "amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now am found, was

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

blind, but now I see.”

“I am not worthy to remove His sandals.” It will start there and it will stop there. And everything in between is colored by it. May God never allow us to be so far removed from this deep sense of humility that we forget we are not worthy to remove His sandals.

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

G

“He Gathered Up Courage and Asked for the Body of Jesus”

“Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.” (Mark 15:43)

Read Mark 15:42-46 — A Courageous Grace

It is hard for us to sometimes place ourselves in the historical circumstances of the biblical text. Yet such an action on our part reaps rich dividends.

The story of Joseph of Arimathea is one of transition and of *courageous grace*. As a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, he was looked upon with respect by his surrounding community. He had what most people strive a lifetime to accumulate. He had prestige, power, and prosperity. Yet, despite his social standing, he believed in Jesus Christ as the anticipated Messiah. The contrast between his status as a member of the Sanhedrin and that of a student of the Rabbi from God (John 3) could not create a more dramatic scenario. Matthew (27:57) and John (19:38) identify him as “a disciple of Jesus.” He was a student of the Rabbi Jesus. And although he opposed the decision of the Sanhedrin in the murdering of Jesus Christ (Luke 23:51), his position as student to Jesus was still unheralded (John 19:38). Yet, Joseph was willing to risk everything he had in order to secure the body of Jesus Christ for burial. Since nothing is said concerning his wife and children, we are left with several scenarios. First, like their husband/father, they were likewise disciples of Jesus. This is highly improbable, but

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

not impossible. Second, they rejected Jesus Christ as a false prophet and were horrified by the actions of their husband/father. They saw in his actions the demise of all "they" had achieved in the community at large. His actions threatened their social standing and this was unacceptable. Third, Joseph was a widower and with adult children (or no children) the implications for them was less significant. Yet what would move him to take such actions in behalf of a leader whose end was already noted? From all human reasoning, Jesus Christ had failed. He was despised, rejected, betrayed, beaten, and killed. His is a picture of empty promises and unfulfilled expectations. Yet, Joseph aligns himself with Jesus Christ at the most inopportune moment. Why now, why this?

Perhaps he saw the travesty of justice, the taking of innocent life; perhaps he was fed up with the hypocrisy of his peers; perhaps he was disgusted with the debauchery of mankind. For whatever reason in this moment of unadulterated devotion, against all odds, he aligned himself with Jesus when there was nothing to be gained. . . "Nothing to be gained." He said, "Enough is enough. I am tired of hiding in the shadows, I am tired of speaking in cryptic language. I AM A LOVER OF JESUS EVEN IF IT COSTS ME EVERYTHING!"

He planted his flag, pledged his loyalty, and stood his ground. Jesus has this affect on those whose hearts have been turned.

In a bold and open move he courageously approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (v. 43). Upon receiving the lifeless body of His Lord and Savior, Joseph tenderly and lovingly did what was necessary in the preparation of the

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

body for burial. No cost was spared and all was absorbed by Joseph himself.

What do you think his life was like after this event? Do you think when rejected by his peers and possibly his family that he began to doubt the wisdom of his decision? When his financial security began to crumble and uncertainty entered his world, do you think any misgivings on his part were present? If Joseph is like the rest of us, we can be assured that he had his moments. Yet, the story does not end with this. Three days after Joseph of Arimathea buries the Lord he loves, Jesus Christ rises from the dead. Whatever doubt and uncertainty he might have had, those walls were decimated, the obstacles of indecision were liquidated, and with His Lord, Joseph rose in triumph!

But what do you think he learned in those moments of uncertainty? Let me suggest just a couple.

First, God is in control. As a learned Jew, Joseph knew that God was in control. He knew that God was not only in control of the larger picture of Scripture but also in the details that make up the picture. He knew Psalm 135:6 and Daniel 4:35, etc. He knew this, and the Holy Spirit reminded Joseph of what this moment was in the larger scheme of things — just as He does for you and me.

Second, God's strength is manifested through his weakness. Where Joseph was weak, God showed Himself strong (2 Cor. 12:10), where he lacked wisdom, God gave direction and guidance, and where he needed grace, God poured out superabundantly — just as He does for you and me.

Third, God's grace is timely and sufficient. Joseph never

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

lacked in the things that matter. We often think of food and shelter, but Joseph never lacked in being loved and accepted by His heavenly Father. Joseph never had to wonder if God was pleased with him. God lavished on him an overabundance of His unprecedented and unconditional love — just as He does for you and me.

Joseph was rich because he found that Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come.

Fourth, He found that Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come. God is no one's debtor. What Joseph did in receiving the body of Christ did not obligate God. God did not now owe Joseph. Joseph's investment reaped enormous dividends.

Joseph was rich because he found that Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come. God enabled Joseph to experience the soul-satisfying sufficiency of who Jesus is and does — just as He does for you and me.

7

“She Put in All She Owned”

*“For they all put in out of their surplus,
but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned,
all she had to live on.” (Mark 15:43)*

Read Mark 12:41-44 — A Sacrificial Grace

In the midst of opulence, hardship and destitution appear distant and foreign. The leeks and onions of one’s captivity (Num. 11:5) are quickly forgotten when enjoying the milk and honey of deliverance (Num. 14:8). The story before us is a familiar one.

“And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, **but she**, out of her poverty, **put in all she owned, all she had to live on**’” (Mark 12:41-44).

A comparison and contrast ride in tandem in the story. In proportion to their resources the rich had put in very little whereas the widow “put in all she owned.” The body of Christ gravitates toward the philanthropist and patron. We embrace the show and fanfare of the wealthy, yet forget so quickly the words of our Lord elsewhere.

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

In Mark 10:23-25 following His discourse with the Rich Young Ruler Jesus said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" His disciples reeled in amazement at His words, yet without hesitation our Lord continued His unsettling barrage of upside down thinking with, "Children, **how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!** It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Yet, before we judge the young ruler too harshly remember what confronted him, "One thing you lack: **go and sell all you possess and give to the poor**, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Paul's thoughts coincide with those of his Lord in 1 Timothy 6:8-11. He says, "If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content." Our difficulty is in our "lust" for more. He continues by noting how, "those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. **For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**" Because this is true, he calls Timothy to "flee from these things."

Oliver Goldsmith was an Irish born British essayist who lived from 1730-1774. He accurately noted, "Where wealth accumulates, men decay." As much as wealth can be an asset, it is also a liability. We either master our wealth or it will master us. The possessing of things is as much a stewardship as it is a privilege.

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will master us.

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

We call the paragraph before us the story of the widow's mite. Let us consider five ideas that flow from this picture of sacrificial grace.

"She put in all she owned." How arrogant. Who does she think she is? Great sacrifice is often met with the response of waste. How dare she! It is the same kind of response we see in Mark 14:3-5.

³ "While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. ⁴ But some were indignantly remarking to one another, '**Why has this perfume been wasted?**' ⁵ For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And **they were scolding her**" (Mark 14:3-5).

I have seen it often in the fellowship of God's people; those who can least afford to give much will give all. We scold such sacrificial grace because of the "burden" it places on the people of God who must now sustain the sacrificial giver. Yet, the giver gave because they believe God, not man. They give because God will never leave them nor forsake them. They give because God is enough in this life and in the life to come.

"She put in all she owned." How haunting. Who would do such a thing? What moves an individual to give so sacrificially and lavishly? Perhaps we would argue that her

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

giving was poorly planned and in the absence of future needs, but “she put in all she owned.” She gave as an expression of her gratitude; she gave because she had received. She acknowledged the depth, and height, and width, and length of God’s actions in her behalf. Perhaps she pondered over her desire to reflect the degree to which she was thankful and she could only think of one thing, “She put in all she owned.” There is a beauty to this mystery the likes of which are seldom encountered, but when experienced must silence the mouth of the skeptic and bend the knee of the blinded.

“She put in all she owned.” How threatening. Those who are comfortable shudder at her actions. Such sacrificial grace threatens our ease and disturbs our picture of normal. Yet this is what God worked in her and through her. Her gift was sourced in God, not man. We are neither to compare nor compete. The lesson is as much in what she gave as in the gift of the wealthy. Both gifts and givers could have been given from a fleshly, selfish, motive and in so doing wreck the purity of the moment. None viewing could have been able to discern the motive of the heart . . . except God. God cares little for the size of the gift. He neither needs nor wants. What God saw was the passion in the giver, a passion that bled love for Him. Had she nothing to give, what she gave was abundant . . . she gave her unadulterated devotion to her God and King. This is still and only what God deserves. He alone is worthy of such actions on our part.

“She put in all she owned.” How intrusive. If such was the benchmark for giving what would be left to live on? Such sacrificial grace invades the strongholds of our heart and tears down the castles of covetousness that have poured

“They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone”

foundations of stone and steel in the dry soil of our hearts. "She put in all she owned." Although God does not demand of us such expressions of grace . . . He might. And should such an invitation come, how would we respond?

The fruit of sacrificial grace was born in the soil of redemption's price.

"She put in all she owned." How humbling. Ultimately we must be humbled by the gracious spirit God chose to display on the canvas of her life. The widow is real. She is flesh and blood. She hungers over missed meals and inadequate supplies. Perhaps she weeps herself to sleep over the loss of loved ones, of haunting memories of bygone days. She knows not what awaits her . . . but God. God awaits her with open arms and an approving smile. God stands ready to call her righteous. The fruit of sacrificial grace was born in the soil of redemption's price.

When such a story graces our meager lives, let us not pity the widow. We must rather pity the stinginess of our own cold and calloused hearts. We must beg God to work in us and through us this sacrificial grace so that the things we possess would no longer possess us. It is the tightfisted and the self-seeking that are to be pitied, not the widow.

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

A Final Word

Christ Alone. How did our Christian walk become so cluttered by all things good that we end up robbing ourselves of Him who is best? How unfortunate . . . how sad.

God grants us a divine picture, personifications of grace, not so much as models to be imitated but pictures to be enjoyed. They are not to be edited. Their presence is without error.

The pictures we have, although accurate, are incomplete. They are not exhaustive presentations. They are suggestive, action stimulating, and thought provoking.

Grace is unfathomable and beyond our ability to search out. It is a destiny that cannot be attained, a journey that has no termination. Yet the destiny refreshes because He is worthy of the attention and affection. The journey gives energy, it emboldens. There is rest in the expenditure of effort. This is the paradox of grace. You cannot get it; you simply receive it.

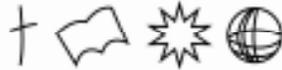
Grace in its expression is singular, thirsting, quiet, transparent, unworthy, courageous, and sacrificial. This is but a taste of God's amazing grace. It is a banquet table filled with delectable morsels spread for the hungry. Each of us is invited to come and partake. There is no final word. Such is impossible. The finite will never comprehend completely the infinite. Yet it is the journey of which He is the destiny that brings comfort to the weary and hope to the downcast. May it please God to use these short studies to

"They Saw No One Except Jesus Himself Alone"

bring to you hope, healing, and wholeness, and may you in
the word of God see Him.

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