

Nothing but the Truth

“True instruction was in [Levi’s] mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin” (Malachi 2:6).

Scripture: Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5, 6

Song: “Ancient Words”

A while back, I was scrolling through my Facebook news feed and came across a post that stopped me cold. A friend had shared an urgent prayer request for a number of Christian missionaries scheduled for execution in a Muslim country the next day. I immediately prayed for the situation. Then I noticed that the original post was dated months previously. What happened to these believers? I wondered. A few minutes of searching for an update revealed that the prayer request was a hoax that had been circulating for years and with no factual basis.

Our culture bombards us daily with carefully crafted spin, fake news, and outright lies. Television and the Internet make it harder than ever to weed out misinformation. Wasting our time on a hoax can be annoying, but deception often carries far more serious consequences. If we base our lives on cultural standards, or anything other than the truth found in God’s Word, we are likely to make poor choices that range from self-centered to self-destructive.

The Bible is the one source we can always trust. It contains God’s instructions on how to have a thriving relationship with Him while living out the new life demanded of a Christ follower. We can depend on His Word to guide us in every decision we make so that we walk in uprightness every day.

Lord, help Your wisdom saturate my mind today and shape my attitudes, my conversation, and my behavior. Amen.

By Faith, Not Deeds

I do not have time to tell about [those] . . . who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised (Hebrews 11:32, 33).

Scripture: Hebrews 11:29-35

Song: “By Faith”

Growing up, I was a “do, do, do” person. I played sports, joined the band, accompanied the choir, and worked hard for good grades. Deep down I knew my shortcomings, and I feared what others would think of me if they knew who I really was without all my outward good deeds.

When we read about the sacrifices God required of the Israelites in the Old Testament, we may think these people were saved because of what they did. Yet Hebrews 11 tells us the Old Testament heroes were saved by their faith. Faith separated the Israelites from the drowning Egyptians. Faith set Rahab apart from the destroyed city of Jericho. The individuals named in Hebrews 11 were praised for their actions, but faith in God enabled their deeds.

When we stop trying to do, do, do, we are better able to hear the truth of God’s Word speaking into our hearts. He doesn’t need our good deeds; He asks for our faith. He desires our surrender to relationship with Him. Surrendering often means an increasing awareness of our own shortcomings. But when we are weak, He makes us strong.

God, thank You for freedom from the strain of trying to be good enough. Please increase my faith in Your love and grace. In Christ, amen.

A View from Below

“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey’” (Matthew 21:5).

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

Song: “Thy Will”

“Life is like a needlepoint project,” said the man across from me. Our group sat in a circle on a Haitian rooftop. We had come to learn about Haiti’s culture and people; and despite the many obstacles Haitians faced, we were learning that hope was present as well. “We see the knotted mess on the bottom,” the man continued, “while God sees the beautiful picture on top.”

The crowds saw Jesus approaching on a donkey and recognized the fulfillment of prophecy, so they responded in joy. However, they understood only a part of what God was doing. They hoped He was bringing a conquering king to save them from Roman oppression, but God had something more glorious in mind—He intended to redeem their hearts.

Sometimes we misunderstand what God is doing. We think He should come riding into our lives on a strong warhorse and save the day, and if He doesn’t we’re disappointed. However, just because He doesn’t always work in the way we hope doesn’t mean He isn’t working. We can see only a part of the picture, and part of following Him means learning to trust that He is creating a tapestry more beautiful than we can yet imagine.

Lord, thank You for showing us in Your Word, time and time again, that Your plans are bigger than we can yet understand. In Jesus’ name, amen.

For All Nations

“Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’” (Mark 11:17).

Scripture: Mark 11:15-19

Song: “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”

Six hundred years ago the opportunity to study God’s Word was rare, because it was written primarily in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. In the 1380s, John Wycliffe began translating the Bible into English. Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and Myles Coverdale followed suit, translating the Word into the vernacular. Today millions of people now have access to God’s Word in their own languages.

In Jesus’ time, Gentiles didn’t have the same opportunities Jews did to worship God. The temple buyers and sellers were most likely operating out of the Court of the Gentiles, the only place in the temple where Gentiles were allowed to worship. By allowing the court to become a marketplace, the temple leaders not only violated the building’s holiness, but actually prevented Gentile worship. In cleansing the temple, Jesus restored its purity and the Gentiles’ place of worship.

What practices do we promote in our places of worship that may actually prevent true worship? Are we teaching about Jesus in such a way as to make the gospel accessible to everyone, regardless of their age, ethnicity, or education level? Jesus came for all people, and an important part of worship is working together to spread His message of grace to everyone.

Jesus, thank You for Your love and concern for all people. Please reveal the areas where I may need to make changes in my worship to welcome everyone. In Your name, amen.

April 2

The Dangers of a Spotlight Faith

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God” (Luke 11:42).

Scripture: Luke 11:42-44

Song: “Humble”

Miss Valera taught elementary Sunday school for years, faithfully showing up each week despite many health challenges. She never looked for the spotlight—in fact, once when she felt she had complained too much about her health struggles, she called my parents to apologize. Her faith was genuine and humble; and when she passed away, hundreds came to her funeral and spoke of the influence she’d had on their lives.

As the Pharisees sought to keep their faith traditions unmarred by Roman influence, they created new “commandments” and became more concerned about outward appearances than about genuine love and worship of God. Some people respected and admired their apparent holiness, but Jesus rebuked their hypocrisy—making it clear they had missed the point. God is more concerned about the state of people’s hearts than He is about the number of things they do.

It is easy to become focused on checklists of things “good Christians” are supposed to do—attending church on Sunday mornings, reading our Bibles daily, praying for our friends or family. These are all good things that, when done with the right attitude, can grow our faith. But when we do these things to gain the spotlight rather than to draw closer to God, we too have missed the point.

God, please forgive me for the times I have pursued the spotlight rather than You. Help me seek a genuine relationship with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Quiet Kind of Justice

“Here is my servant. . . . He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets” (Matthew 12:18, 19).

Scripture: Matthew 12:15-21

Song: “Victory in Jesus”

During the pre–Civil War era, a few fiery abolitionists thought that the way to justice was through force. But in Boston, minister Leonard Grimes pursued a different path. When he discovered that a faithful parishioner, Anthony Burns, was being sent back into slavery because of the Fugitive Slave Act, he hurriedly raised funds to buy Burns from his owner. A corrupt marshal thwarted Grimes’s plans, but the minister didn’t give up. Grimes raised funds again and traveled south to find Burns, buy him, and set him free.

Jesus had His moments of fire-and-brimstone preaching, as we can see in His condemnations of the Pharisees (Matthew 23). Overall, though, He spread a quiet kind of justice. His actions were still radical—He touched victims of leprosy, welcomed the hated tax collector as His disciple, and set free the woman caught in adultery. But He rarely turned to violent, dramatic demonstrations of justice. Sometimes when He healed, He even warned the recipients not to speak of what He had done for them.

Figuring out how to pursue justice well can be hard, but Jesus’ example gives us a place to start. He proved that justice didn’t have to be noisy, quarrelsome, or violent to be victorious. His quiet compassion and faithful proclamation of the truth provide a model that is both radical and just.

Lord Jesus, when the world sends us conflicting messages about the pursuit of justice, teach us to look to You for truth and direction. In Your name, amen.

April 4

Out of Darkness

“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them” (Isaiah 42:16).

Scripture: Isaiah 42:10-17

Song: “Marvelous Light”

During a trip to Iceland, my brother and I had the opportunity to go lava caving. At one point, our guide had us sit down and turn out our headlamps so that we could experience the full effect of the darkness. I realized then how utterly dependent we were on our guide. If he had left us, I would have had no idea which direction to go to escape the dark. Thankfully, he was a good guide and brought us safely back out into the light.

In many ways, the people of Israel were as spiritually blind as I was physically blind in that cave. God promised not to forsake His people in the darkness but to lead them through it. All they had to do was trust Him.

God’s offer to provide direction through darkness is still good today. Trusting in a God we cannot see can be difficult, yet step-by-step He will draw back the darkness and reveal the path we should take. And with each step, our faith in Him will increase as He proves himself faithful, again and again and again. All we need to do is trust enough to take the first step.

Lord, thank You for guiding us when we can’t see the path before us. Increase our ability to trust You, and give us courage to take continuing steps of faith with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.