

years under the great rabbi's wings but it certainly gives hope for us, doesn't it? In spite of sharing with His followers repeatedly what was going to happen they didn't comprehend His message. Peter couldn't believe he would deny Jesus, but he did. The rest of his followers except for John scattered like sheep without a shepherd after the Garden. Ironically John is the only one of the original disciples that did not go on to die a martyr's death for the hope they had in the very Jesus that they had all but abandoned prior to seeing Him resurrected. Jesus did what He said He was going to do. Simply put He told the truth and this truth was validated by His post-crucifixion appearances to each of them. Within a few minutes walk of the empty tomb in Jerusalem the first sermon about the risen Jesus is recorded – Peter preached and three thousand believed. (Acts 2:41) Shortly thereafter five thousand more believed. (Acts 4:4) Five weeks after Jesus was crucified over ten thousand Jews are following Him. This truth lit a fire that burns to this day and has turned the world upside down.

Saturday of Easter Week – The Truth Will Set You Free

Read John 8:31-36. The freedom Jesus claimed to bring was far greater than anyone could have imagined at the time. He was a Messiah that was not going to help the Jewish nation throw off the bonds of Roman oppression, but instead He offered freedom for mankind from a far more serious and permanent kind of oppression that no earthly political leader could deliver their people from. He offered man the restoration and freedom that was lost in the Garden back in the third chapter of Genesis. The second temple that the Jews of Jesus time held so dear was going to ultimately be destroyed within a generation. Roughly four hundred years later the Roman empire would also fall. The freedom from bondage that Jesus offered remains to this day. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) The Father sent Jesus to provide the way back to Him and this was accomplished on Easter morning as Jesus appeared to His confused and terrified band of followers. This event changed the world. The burden of proof for the truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus does not lie upon the believer. Instead the skeptic needs to offer a convincing alternative. Few moments in all of human history have greater import than this singular event. Jesus came, died, and rose again because He wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4) This is the truth we celebrate each Sunday and every Easter. The truth about who Jesus is and what He did for us. Today we have unprecedented, unimaginable information at our fingertips, but between "fake news" and the crushing onslaught of real news we are like the people Paul describes that are "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 3:7) We don't need more information about the truth, we need to meet The Truth Himself. Perhaps the most powerful case for the resurrection of Jesus is the millions of lives changed since that first sermon in Jerusalem. He is alive today and is still in the business of setting captive sinners free. Whatever issues you may be facing, be encouraged that the tomb is still empty. This means Jesus conquered death itself and surely, He can help you with your challenges. Because of Easter Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Take heart! He has risen, He has risen indeed! Alleluia!

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Bring It Home

*Devotions for
the week of
April 16, 2017
Easter Week*

WHAT NOW?

1. In light of Jesus' Easter victory, how can you live on that firm foundation of Jesus? What changes can He help you make with your priorities? What storms are you going through right now that He can help see you through? Trust His promises. Believe His Word. Let Him be your firm foundation for life.
2. Continue with the "Love Assignment" of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. This is week 9 of 16 (and it's never too late to jump into this assignment!), love as it's expressed in "keeping no record of wrongs." How can you practice love in this way throughout this week? Let Jesus' Love Work in you and through you in amazing ways!

Monday of Easter Week — What is Truth?

Read John 18:33-38. For over two millennia mankind has struggled with the issue of truth. The great irony in today's reading is that Pilate stood before The Truth incarnate as he asked his famous question, "What is truth?" Truth continues to take center stage in our modern world as just this last year Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year was "post-truth." The post-truth era we now live in is characterized by the perception that facts are less influential to people than appeals to emotion and personal belief. Is it true that truth doesn't matter? Can truth be known? Is truth a matter of what makes us feel good, or is it absolute? What does truth have to do with Easter? Paul was clear in stating if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, our faith is useless, and we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:9) It is amazing the inconsistency we presently see in our culture regarding

expectations for truth in issues of religion, politics, or morality. While people will assert that truth is relative, can't be known, or simply doesn't matter in these areas of life, they have far different expectations in others. We demand truth from our doctors, we demand truth from those we have business dealings with and we demand truth in our personal relationships. Lawsuits and divorce occurs when our expectations are not met. Regardless what your opinion is of Newton's Laws of Motion, if you step off a curb in front of an oncoming bus bad things will happen. These natural laws exist whether you are aware of them or not and whether you agree with them or not. They are absolute and are not contingent on your feelings or opinions. They exist, can be known, and are not relative - they are true. Life would be untenable without objective consistent truth in the tangible areas of our lives, yet why do we act like they don't matter in others? Ideas have consequences and the truth of Jesus' resurrection has eternal implications for mankind. Take a moment and consider the empty tomb and the events that led up to it. What does it tell you about the heart of your Father and the hope we can have in the Son?

Tuesday of Easter Week— The Gospel Truth

Resurrection apologist Gary Habermas in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* shares five principles historians employ to determine the credibility of a historical event. Historical claims are supported when they have multiple, independent sources, are attested to by enemies, include embarrassing admissions, contain eyewitness testimony, and that the testimony is early. Based upon these principles, he has developed a case for the resurrection called the Minimal Facts Approach. These five historical facts are agreed to by almost all historians whether Christian or skeptic. These facts are: Jesus' death by crucifixion, the disciples' belief that Jesus appeared to them, the conversion of Paul, the conversion of James, and lastly the empty tomb. While time will not permit all of these facts to be covered this week we will review a few. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. This text from Paul is believed to be one of the earliest creeds of the Christian church. During this time, few people knew how to read and oral tradition was used to pass on information. Jesus used parables, the early church used carefully constructed creeds. It is believed Paul picked up this creed either in Damascus or during his trip to Jerusalem when he met with Peter and James. Habermas dates this creed between AD 32-38 which is two to eight years after the resurrection! What is the heart of Paul's Gospel? Jesus died for us and rose again. He then appeared to numerous people and lastly to Paul himself. Bear in mind that most of the people Paul mentions as seeing Jesus were still alive and could have disputed this creed if it was false. We have extremely early eye witness testimony of multiple sources. Paul asserts in his Gospel that what he has passed on is of first importance – it is about Jesus, what he did for us, and why. Take another moment to read through today's reading once more and consider again why the creed was so important to the early believers.

Wednesday of Easter Week — Family Truth

Read Mark 6:1-4. We all know how foundational, important, and complicated familial relationships are. Our families can be our strongest supporters and also our harshest critics. Jesus was as a member of a conquered people, born in a manger, and then grew up in a lower-class family in a backwater town. Imagine what it must have been like for Him to grow up in the honor-shame culture of ancient Israel with His fatherhood in question. The embarrassing reality is that Mark reports that during Jesus' life His own family "took offense at him." That prompted Jesus to reply, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives, and in his own home." If one was going to make up a story of God becoming man I couldn't imagine a less compelling narrative. We know that Jesus had at least four brothers, plus some unnamed sisters. Jewish historian Josephus mentions, "the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, whose name was James." Additionally, in 2002, an ancient ossuary or bone box was found dating to the first century with the inscription, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." James was a devout Jewish believer that

strictly followed Jewish law. In Paul's creed from Corinthians James is mentioned specifically as one who saw Jesus after the resurrection. James went on to become the head of the Jerusalem church as he presided over the Council of Jerusalem. (Acts 15:21-22) Finally, no less than three sources (Josephus, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria) attest to James' martyrdom for his faith in the brother he didn't believe in prior to Easter. Something happened after Jesus death that changed James. How do we explain this? Something affected James so strongly that it overcame a lifetime of suspicions and doubt. Seeing your own brother come back from the dead could do that to you! Perhaps your family situation like Jesus' own is not all you hoped that it would be. Maybe there are some estranged relationships, deeply rooted hurts, or disappointments. Take heart – He knows how you feel. He's been down this road, too. The resurrection has the power to heal any broken relationship. Look what it did for James...

Thursday of Easter Week — Blinded by the Truth

Few stories are more compelling than the life of Paul. Thirteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament were written by the very person that was involved in the murder of the first Christian martyr. How did this happen? This is as improbable an event as the present-day leader of ISIS suddenly becoming a Christian and then going on to be the greatest evangelist of the 21st century! What happened on the road to Damascus? While Jesus' brother James may have been a skeptic, Paul was a committed and active enemy of Christianity. Could you imagine how outraged Paul the Pharisee was with this new upstart cult following their fraudulent Messiah? These Jewish followers of The Way turned their back on everything that made them Jewish! They abandoned the five social structures that they had scrupulously observed for almost fifteen hundred years. They stopped performing animal sacrifices for sin. They said that it was not keeping Jewish law that made you righteous before God. They changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday because this is the day Jesus supposedly rose from the dead. Perhaps the greatest offense of all as committed monotheists was that they held the blasphemous conviction that Jesus (a man) was God! Lastly, they portrayed the long-awaited Messiah as a suffering servant whereas Paul's entire life he had been taught that the Messiah would be a political leader who would overthrow the cursed Romans. He didn't dislike the followers of The Way – he hated them. Yet on that road to Damascus not only did he turn his back on his education, his heritage, and social position, but he became a member of The Way himself. This decision cost him everything he had worked to achieve, and in the roughly thirty years that followed Paul's introduction to the risen Jesus, he suffered staggering hardships. Paul, a Roman citizen, was not crucified like his Lord, but instead it is believed he was beheaded in Rome by Nero. Read Philippians 3:7 and ask yourself what could have caused this kind of change of heart? In the words of Sherlock Holmes, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." However improbable this change of heart was, I think we can only conclude that Paul did indeed meet Jesus in the flesh on that road to Damascus.

Friday of Easter Week — Shockwaves of Truth

Read Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19. Nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov, a leading physicist in the development of the Soviet atomic bomb, said before he died: "I always thought the most powerful weapon in the world was the bomb. I have changed my mind. The most powerful weapon in the world is not the bomb. It is the truth." Few could argue that a cultural explosion took place in first century Israel shortly after the death of the Jewish rabbi called Jesus. The fuel that drove this event was truth. Jesus foretold his death at least three times in the Gospel accounts. He also promised that He would rise again – a promise He kept. What gives the Gospel narratives so much credibility is the very human ways the disciples are portrayed. In hindsight, they couldn't see and understand what Jesus was sharing with them. Like us, in the heat of the moment of our busy and stressful lives we often can't seem to see the forest for the trees. This is not a flattering portrayal of those that spent three