

# **The Call of God—a Daily Bible Guide**

## **Leap of Faith 2015—Week 4**

**Monday, March 16**

**Read Matthew 16:13-28**

### **Points of Interest**

- ‘others say Elijah’—John the Baptist and Elijah may be two plausible theories:
  - Jesus picked up right where John left off; maybe he is, in fact, John, and news of John’s imprisonment and execution is just a bunch of nasty rumors;
  - Elijah never actually died, but was taken up to heaven in a fiery, flying chariot (2 Kings 2); maybe he’s now returned to finish his work.
- There’d be no specific reason to think that Jesus is Jeremiah or any of the other prophets. Basically, with those guesses, the people are saying that Jesus is, in general, a throwback to the time of the great prophets.
- ‘But what about you?’—Jesus assumes their answer is different, which it is. They’ve been paying attention to what Jesus is doing, just like Jesus suggested John’s followers do (yesterday’s passage). And, apparently with some inspiration, they see that Jesus is not one of the old-time prophets; he’s the holy king those prophets looked forward to.
- ‘on this rock I will build my church’—*Peter* means, ‘rock.’ Jesus is saying that The Rock, as it were, is going to be a foundation stone for the new community he is building.
- ‘the gates of death will not overcome it’—Jesus shifts the image some. The church goes from being a building to being a strong, solid battering ram. It’s job is to bust down death’s door
- ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven’—you give your keys to someone you really trust. There’s nothing Jesus will keep locked away from Peter.
- ‘not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah’—this is the biggest news story ever. The long-awaited Savior is here! Strangely, though, Jesus wants the disciples to keep it under their hats.
- ‘he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things’—the sentence starts out just like they might expect. I can imagine the disciples nodding along with Jesus as he talks about going to Jerusalem. Maybe they even try to finish his sentence for him, ‘. . . and take up the throne of his forefather David.’ But Jesus’ sentence takes a sudden, unexpected, unpleasant turn. It’s hard to imagine the shock this would cause the disciples: ‘Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. You’re saying the Messiah is going to Jerusalem to be rejected and killed?’
- ‘Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him’—in his shock, Peter doesn’t quite think this through. If Jesus is indeed the Messiah, taking him to task like he’s an errant child isn’t the most prudent thing to do. I think Peter is having a hard time dealing with the major swings of fortune he’s experiencing. First, the simple fisherman from Galilee discovers that he’s one of the chief followers of the Messiah himself. Then, he makes the less welcome discovery that, apparently, this Messiah is a pessimist: Jesus believes he’s the Messiah, but also thinks he’ll fail and be killed. The best thing Peter can think of in the moment is that the Messiah seems to need a pep talk.
- ‘Get behind me, Satan!’—one of Satan’s primary roles is as a tempter. In the Garden of Eden, in the form of a serpent, Satan convinced Eve and Adam to eat the prohibited fruit. He promised them it would make them into gods; and, anyway, the fruit looked good, and smelled good, and seemed like it might taste good. So, they ate it. What they got was misery, and conflict, and death. According to Jesus, Simon is playing the devil’s role here. He’s offering Jesus something that looks good (avoiding suffering), but would actually turn out for the worse.
- ‘You are a stumbling block to me’—Simon goes from being The Rock to being Satan, and from being a foundation stone to being a big stone sitting in the middle of the building site constantly getting in the way. I’m intrigued by the fact that Jesus sticks with stone imagery to describe Simon. It’s as if he’s saying that it’s in Peter’s nature to be a rock. He can’t help but be strong and solid like a building block. The question is whether that rock-like character will prove to be a help or a hindrance to Jesus’ mission of rescuing the world from death.
- ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple’—each of these people has already dropped their fishnets, gotten out of their boat, or left their tax booth behind to follow Jesus. But they’re at a new decision point now. Now that they know that a) Jesus is the heavenly king and b) that he intends to get himself killed, they must decide whether or not to keep following him.
- ‘take up their cross’—our view of crosses is fundamentally altered by the fact that we know the story that Jesus died on a cross and rose again. For Jesus’ original listeners here, there’s no theological meaning to a cross. It’s a stark, brutal image. He’s saying: ‘If you want to follow me, prepare to end up on death row.’

- ‘whoever loses their life for me will find it’—Jesus tells his followers that he’s leading them to death row. But it’s not because he enjoys pain and suffering. And it’s not because he knows he will fail but wants to go down shooting. It’s because he believes that if they lose the life they have, they’ll discover a more valuable one. ‘Losing their life’ isn’t the end; it’s the way to what he actually wants for them: a life that can’t be taken away from them, filled with glory, and angels, and God’s presence.
- ‘what can you give in exchange for your soul?’—in this series of questions, I think Jesus is referring to Psalm 49. In that psalm, a rich person spends their life doing whatever they can (including taking advantage of others, among other things) to save up enough money to buy themselves a new life, only to realize in the end that the price tag is too high. Once you use up your one life, there’s no way to get another. Jesus is forcing us to face an unpleasant fact that we spend a lot of time avoiding: we will die. Our life is our most valuable possession; everything else is pointless, if we aren’t alive. But this most valuable possession has an expiration date. We can spend our entire lives trying to stay alive, ultimately to fail anyway. Jesus calls that a waste of a life. He has an intriguing, risky—terrifying even—alternative. Invest our lives in him, and his Father will give us a new, better one. The big question we have is, ‘Do we trust Jesus with our lives?’ I suppose a different question Jesus might throw back our way is, ‘Do you have a better offer?’ We’re all alive, and we will all die. Jesus is offering a way to invest our lives in a future life, instead of just slowly spending it.
- ‘whoever wants to save their life will lose it’—this is why Jesus rebukes Peter so sharply. Peter is urging Jesus to save his own life, but Jesus knows that any such effort will only lead to eventual death anyway. If Jesus were to take Peter’s advice, he’d end up dead. Jesus himself is taking the risk of faith he’s recommending to his followers. He’ll lose his life, trusting God to give him a new and better one.
- ‘according to what they have done’—I don’t think this is referring to the iconic idea of weighing out our good and bad deeds. Rather, it’s referring to the big life choice Jesus has been talking about: have we saved our lives to lose them, or lost our lives to save them?

## Taking It Home

- *For you:* Can you relate to Peter’s desire to avoid suffering? What are the ways you find yourself tempted to aim towards a path that at least initially looks more appealing? Jesus saw through the apparent allure of Peter’s proposal and knew that it wasn’t what God had for him. Ask God to give you wisdom and the ability to quickly discern the ways that Satan is tempting you.
- *For your five:* Jesus didn’t seem to care so much about the popular opinion and all the conjectures of who people thought he might be, instead he cared about his disciples’ personal view on who he was. What do your five think of Jesus? Who do they see him as? If you don’t know what your five think about Jesus, consider asking them. Pray that your five would have understanding about and a desire to know the identity of Jesus.
- *For our church:* Jesus isn’t content having Peter sit around just watching. He’s giving him the keys to the kingdom of heaven: ‘Get off the bench, and into the game.’ Pray today for the ways that God is inviting us to actively be a part of what he is doing. Pray that we would recognize the specific ways in which God is inviting us to join him.

**Tuesday, March 17**

**Read Matthew 17:1-13**

## Points of Interest

- ‘After six days’—a little less than a week has passed since yesterday’s passage. Perhaps this is the promised glimpse of Jesus in his full kingship.
- ‘there appeared before them Moses and Elijah’—it’s significant that Moses and Elijah show up here, for a number of reasons:
  - They ought to be dead—Moses lived around 1500 years and Elijah around 800 years before Jesus. They should be long dead by now, but here they are talking to Jesus. As I mentioned yesterday, Elijah never properly died, but was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Moses did die, but his death is covered in mystery (Deuteronomy 34): he wandered off into the desert alone and died; he was buried by God’s own hand; and no human being ever saw Moses’ body or knows where it is. And, did I mention, after their mysterious departures from the world, here both of them are hundreds of years later chatting with Jesus. In yesterday’s passage, Jesus told his disciples that he was going to let himself be killed, so that he could be raised back to life; and he went on to recommend that his followers do the same. As I mentioned, it’s sort of a big gamble. Six days later, Jesus gives three of his disciples some proof that this crazy plan could actually work: Moses and Elijah both seem to have escaped death—one by avoiding it altogether, and the other by going through it and out the other side.

- They both had mid-career meetings, mountain-top meetings with God—after rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, and before leading them through the desert, Moses stops at Mt. Horeb to get his next assignment from God. That's when God gives Moses the Ten Commandments. Elijah also visits God at Mt. Horeb after defeating the prophets of Baal (it was our March 3<sup>rd</sup> passage). Jesus too meets with God—as well as his two colleagues Moses and Elijah—on the top of a mountain (though probably not Horeb) before moving on to a new phase of his work.
  - They represent the story of God thus far—the Jewish Bible was categorized into two sections: the Law, and the Prophets. Moses is the author of the Law. Elijah is one of the prophets. They're personifications of God's interactions with human beings up to this point. They're the living symbols of the Bible.
- ‘talking with Jesus’—it seems to me that the big reason for this whole visitation is to encourage the disciples. But perhaps there’s some encouragement for Jesus here as well. He tried to talk with the disciples about what he would be facing, and it didn’t go well: he ended up calling one of them the devil. Maybe Moses and Elijah would understand Jesus and his situation better.
- ‘it is good for us to be here’—in Mark’s version of the story (which is likely based on Peter’s own account of the event), Marks tags a little comment at the end of Peter’s interjection: ‘He didn’t know what to say.’ Peter feels a desperate need to say something, and to prove he belongs here. So, he just starts talking, figuring something will come to him.
- ‘If you wish, I will put up three shelters’—apparently, Peter is hoping they’ll stay for a while.
- ‘Listen to him!’—the voice of God essentially repeats what God said at the baptism (last Wednesday’s passage, Mark 1), except this time God’s talking to the disciples instead of Jesus. And God adds the command at the end: ‘Listen to him.’ Jesus and Peter had an argument six days ago: Jesus said he was going to be killed; Peter said he wasn’t; Jesus called Peter, ‘Satan.’ Jesus calls God the Father in to referee that argument; and God definitively rules in favor of Jesus.
- ‘they saw no one except Jesus’—lest the disciples be confused about who exactly they are supposed to listen to, God whisks Moses and Elijah away leaving only Jesus. They should listen to Jesus even more than the Law and the Prophets. Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are all on the same team; but Jesus is taking things to a whole new level. There will be a new chapter in the story.
- ‘Don’t tell anyone what you have seen’—once again, Jesus commands them not to tell their exciting news. After what happened in yesterday’s passage, I can see why. The disciples don’t really seem to understand what’s going on. If they went and spread the story now, there’s a good chance they could pretty badly misrepresent things.
- ‘Elijah must come first?’—the prophet Malachi had said that Elijah would return before the Messiah came, to set everything straight (Malachi 4:5-6). If this appearance of Elijah on the mountain was the return Malachi talked about, it seems to the disciples like his stay was a little short.
- ‘he was talking to them about John the Baptist’—John said of Jesus, ‘After me comes the one more powerful.’ It turns out it’s also the case here. Just like John was rejected and suffered, so Jesus will be. Jesus has said that he will rise again after he has suffered and been killed. Maybe John has gone before him in saving his life to lose it as well.

## Taking it home

- *For you:* Yesterday, we talked about getting in the game. But, in today’s passage we see that it can sometimes be taken too far. Peter is so concerned about finding a way to be useful here that he almost misses out on what Jesus has for him. Do you sometimes feel the pressure to be helpful to God? God isn’t asking Peter to be helpful, God is asking him to listen. Are there ways that you choose doing things for God in place of just spending time with him? Consider that while God might want you to be a part of what he is doing in the world, he wants a relationship with you over your service to him. Do you feel like God loves you and that he is ‘well pleased’ with you? Or do you feel like you have to earn his approval by doing nice helpful things for God?
- *For your five:* It takes the disciples awhile to understand what exactly Jesus is trying to tell them. Just like last week where we saw how Elizabeth helped Mary understand what God was going to do through her, John the Baptist helps the disciples understand what Jesus is being called to do. Pray for any ways where your five feel confused by Jesus. Ask God to give them understanding and clear examples that give them a picture of what he might mean for their life.
- *For our church:* The appearance of Elijah and Moses was significant because it connected Jesus to the larger story of what God had been doing in the world. It’s as if God speaks to the disciples from within a story they will understand. He uses characters they recognize, and they are able to see better how the plot might unfold. Pray that our church would be a part of the current story God is writing in the world today. Pray that our church could help show people where Jesus fits into their story.

**Wednesday, March 18**  
**Read Matthew 20:17-28**

**Points of Interest**

- Jesus was going up to Jerusalem'—Jesus is heading straight toward the place where he knows very well trouble is awaiting him.
- 'he took the Twelve aside'—in Monday's passage, Peter took Jesus aside. This time, Jesus takes the disciples aside, to tell them once again that he's heading knowingly toward conflict and death. It's part of the plan.
- 'hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified'—a common idea about the Messiah is that he would chase all the Gentiles (non-Jews) out of the country. Jesus is saying that, instead, the religious leaders among the Jews are going to betray him to the Gentiles. It keeps getting crazier.
- 'On the third day he will be raised to life'—this is the part the disciples keep missing. Jesus is knowingly heading toward suffering and death, but he's not planning on staying dead.
- 'the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons'—James and John left their father in the boat to follow Jesus, but apparently that doesn't mean they totally abandoned their family. Their mother knows Jesus well enough to ask him a favor.
- 'You don't know what you are asking'—apparently, they haven't been paying particularly close attention to what Jesus has been saying recently, or they're in denial. Peter got the nice nickname and the keys. They want a juicy little plum from being so close to the Messiah too. They haven't quite figured out yet that being close to the Messiah might mean sharing in all of this suffering he's been talking about.
- 'You will indeed drink from my cup'—I don't think James and John really know what they're saying when they say, 'We can.' They haven't yet demonstrated that they have it in them to follow Jesus all the way to the cross. But Jesus takes it, just like God accepted Isaiah's, 'Here I am. Send me' (Isaiah 6, March 4<sup>th</sup>). They might not be able to do it yet, but they will.
- 'to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant'—I think this is a little sneaky of Jesus. They ask to get the thrones on either side of him. He says they can only have them if they share his suffering with him. They promise they will. Then, Jesus tells them that what they've asked isn't even in his authority to give. Being willing to drink from Jesus' cup is just the prerequisite for competing for the thrones; it's not the finish line.
- 'they were indignant with the two brothers'—I get the impression that the others aren't so much disapproving of the brothers' crassness, as they're disappointed they didn't think of it first.
- 'whoever wants to become great'—perhaps this is why Jesus can't grant this favor to James and John. It's an open field. Greatness is available to whoever chooses the hard work of getting it.
- 'Not so with you'—you can usually tell who's great by how many people they tell what to do. In Jesus' kingdom, greatness is measured by how many people you help. Again, like with Jesus' teaching about life and death two passages ago, the temptation is to grab after greatness. Jesus says it will elude us if we do. The better way is to choose humility, help others, and trust God to give us greatness.
- 'just as the Son of Man did not come to be served'—they are, after all, following Jesus. And Jesus is serving people, not ordering them around.
- 'a ransom for many'—two passages ago, Jesus spoke of the fact that our lives are held hostage by death. And there's nothing we can do about it; even if we were the richest people in the world, we couldn't pay death's ransom demands. Jesus, however, can. Not just for himself, but for anyone who will let him do it. It's a free offer. And many—though not all—will say yes.

**Taking It Home**

- *For you:* Are there ways that you resonate with James' and John's longing to be recognized? Do you ever kind of feel like, 'Why doesn't anyone tell me how great of a job im doing here!?' Today consider giving Jesus' promise that greatness actually comes from humility and helping others a try. What are the ways that you might serve those around you today? Are there specific people you have been trying to look better than? How might you actually help them get ahead today? Are there any ways God is asking you to be humble and trust him for any greatness or recognition you maybe longing for?
- *For your five:* Jesus says that he came to serve. I get the picture of a personal assistant who is willing to do anything and everything at a moment's notice if he is beckoned. Ask that Jesus would be of help to your five today. Pray for any ways where they need help—small or large—that they would look to Jesus and that he would come through for them. Ask your five if there have been times when they really felt like God helped them out.
- *For our church:* During the Leap of Faith we've been spending a lot of time thinking about and praying for big things God might do for us and through us. As we believe God for and pursue these things, pray that God would protect us from the temptation to grab at greatness. Pray that we would put the onus on God to do the great

things we long to see and that our church would be characterized by an incredible attitude of humility and service.

## Thursday, March 19

Luke 9:57-62

### Points of Interest

- ‘I will follow you wherever you go’—I think this is Jesus’ new version of the phrase we saw so much in our earlier passages: ‘Here I am. Send me.’ God has his feelers out for people who are ready and available. One thing that strikes me about both the Old Testament and New Testament versions of the phrase is how active they are. God isn’t just looking for people who believe in him, but people who are willing to do something with God.  
Interestingly, in this passage, Jesus encounters three people who are expressing just that willingness, but he seems reluctant to take them on. This is the first time we’ve run across a situation like this. It seems that now that Jesus has declared his intentions to go to Jerusalem to be killed, he wants people to think twice before committing.
- ‘the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’—I have a friend who, for a while, was moving so frequently that when asked for his address, he’d give his car’s license plate number. I think that might be Jesus’ point here. Even foxes and birds have a place they call home, a place where they eventually stop. For Jesus and his followers, there’s no stopping. So, make sure you go to the bathroom before we leave.
- ‘first let me go and bury my father’—this is the first time someone hasn’t immediately dropped whatever they’re doing to follow Jesus. On first glance, it does seem like a reasonable request. However, many commentators think that the man might not exactly be asking for permission to attend the funeral of a recently deceased parent. It could be that his father is still alive, and the man is essentially asking, ‘I’d like to follow you, but can we wait until after my parents have died?’
- ‘Let the dead bury their own dead’—I can’t escape the feeling that this is a bit harsh toward the parents. The point, however, seems to be that this man isn’t treating the decision with the immediacy and sobriety it deserves. This is a life or death situation, and there’s no chance to do something else first and come back to this later.
- ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow’—this is an interesting twist on the Elisha story (1 Kings 19, March 3<sup>rd</sup>). Elisha did, in fact, say good-bye to his parents, by burning his plow, the tool of his life before God’s calling. In Jesus’ version, the plowing is the work of the kingdom of God. There’s much work to be done, and no time for coffee breaks.

### Taking It Home

- *For you:* Plows and families were symbols of relational and financial security. It’s not that the people in this passage are opposed to Jesus; they’re just not quite ready to trust their entire livelihood to him. Jesus doesn’t seem to be too concerned about their hesitations; it’s as if he’s saying, ‘Don’t worry, you really will be okay’. Are you trying to follow Jesus but still a little concerned about your livelihood or how it will all work out or if you’ll be financially secure? What are the risky ways that God is asking you to step out? If you can, tell God that you trust him with everything and that you trust him to take care of all of your needs. If that still seems a bit much, ask God to increase your trust in him—or just tell God why you are hesitating, and see if God has any response.
- *For your five:* Pray today that God would provide for the financial and relational needs of your five. In whatever ways your five feel worried, anxious or burdened by trying to have to provide for themselves, ask that God would give his peace and assurance.
- *For our church:* In this passage, Jesus lays some pretty high stakes on following him. We also get the picture of the Kingdom of God as being something so dynamic and exciting that it requires such wholehearted commitment. Pray that God would increase our church’s sense of both of these things—pray that we would in fact experience and get to play a tangible part in God’s kingdom coming to this earth. As well, pray that we would be ready to go after this wholeheartedly.

## Friday, March 20

Read Luke 10:1-21

### Points of Interest

- ‘but the workers are few’—we might expect the opposite problem: many workers, but a small job. In fact, Jesus says, there’s no shortage of people interested in what Jesus has to offer. The problem is that there are too few people willing and able to share it.
- ‘I am sending you out like lambs among wolves’—I’m sure that’s not a very comforting idea to the disciples. Last I heard, wolves eat lambs. Once again, it seems, the issue is trust. Jesus is putting them into a situation where, by any rational assessment, they should be eaten alive. Will they trust that he will see them through?

- ‘Peace to this house’—now it becomes a bit more clear why the market is so good for what Jesus is offering. He’s giving peace. Who wouldn’t want that? I guess the question is, why are the workers so few?
- ‘if not, it will return to you’—they don’t need to worry about losing out here. Either they see their peace multiplied, because other people accept it, or it comes back to them unspent.
- ‘whatever they give you’—it’s a two-way street. They offer God’s peace to the people they meet, and those people offer them food and shelter.
- ‘Do not move around’—rather than spreading themselves thin by jumping from house to house, Jesus suggests that they get to know a few people a little better. Perhaps those people will then be able to pass the word, and the peace, on to others.
- ‘Heal the sick who are there’—this reminds me of our very first passage, Genesis 1. Just like God sent the human beings, male and female, into the world to do what he does (bringing abundance and order to the world), Jesus sends his followers into the world two-by-two to do what he does (heal the sick, and spread the news about the coming of God’s kingdom).
- ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet’—a dramatic way of saying, ‘We want absolutely nothing to do with you.’
- ‘it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom’—Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon are surrounding non-Jewish cities with bad reputations. Sodom, in fact, was such an awful place that God destroyed it during the time of Abraham. Tyre and Sidon are where Jezebel, Ahab’s queen (1 Kings 19, March 3<sup>rd</sup>), was from. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are the Jewish towns in Jesus’ general area of operation, in which he himself has spent much of his time. Apparently, while the harvest is plentiful, it’s not exactly where you expect it to be. Maybe the people who are ‘in the club,’ as it were, think they already have what Jesus is offering: ‘No thanks, I gave at the office.’ This reminds me of what Jesus said at the house of Levi (last Friday, Matthew 9:9-13): ‘I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners.’
- ‘The seventy-two returned with joy’—they return, and not mangled by wolf attacks. The plan works. The lambs face the wolves, and the lambs win.
- ‘to trample on snakes and scorpions’—I think these snakes and scorpions are the same as the wolves earlier in the passage: they’re spiritual opponents of Jesus and his kingdom. The seventy-two find them de-fanged.
- ‘but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’—they see some amazing things, and accomplish something pretty impressive. But it’s not ultimately about what they can do. They’re just saving their lives here, by losing them for Jesus’ sake.
- ‘revealed them to little children’—this reminds me of what Jesus says to Nicodemus—and Nicodemus objects to—about being born a second time from above (last Saturday’s passage). The seventy-two are just kids at this. They’re just getting started. And maybe the fact that they’re willing to be beginners is what allows them to do it at all.

## Taking It Home

- *For you:* When the disciples went to a town, they were supposed to look for those who would welcome them. When they found that person of peace they weren’t supposed to move around but were supposed to stay there, invest and see God work. What are the places, people or arenas in your life where you seemed to be specifically welcomed and received openly? Pray that God would use these open doors and that use you to help offer his peace. How is God asking you to invest in those situations? Is there a tangible idea you have to offer peace?
- *For your five:* In each village the 72 looked for ways that God was already at work and found ways to contribute to that. Ask God to show you the ways he is already working in your five. What are the ways that your five are already receptive to him? Pray blessing on even the smallest ways that your six are open and receptive to God.
- *For our church:* Does secular culture seem to you like an unlikely place for people to be interested in God? Pray today for people in our secular society, believing that there is actually tons of openness and receptivity to God. Ask God to raise up tons of people who are committed to sharing God with secularists. Pray that our church would play a significant role in helping people be able to do this.

**Saturday, March 21**  
**Read Luke 13:22-30**

## Points of Interest

- ‘are only a few people going to be saved?’—the prophets were a bit confusing on this point. At some points, they indicate that only a small remnant of Israel’s descendants will survive and be saved (Isaiah 10:20-22, for instance). At others, they talk of all of Israel—and other nations as well—being rescued from the trouble they

are in (see Isaiah 45:22-25). A lot rests, of course, on the answer to this question. Truth be told, both ideas, taken to their limit, are a bit dissatisfying to me. If only a few people, from one particular group, are God's special ones worth rescuing, that seems a bit unfair—to say the least—to the rest of us. If everyone, in the end, is accepted by God, does that mean that nothing we do—good or bad—ultimately matters? In other words, either one of these ways of thinking, if taken to their extreme, takes most of the motivation out of life. Either most of us are doomed no matter what, or all of us are fine no matter what. Perhaps there's a reason the prophets don't land on one or the other.

- 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door'—at the very least, Jesus makes clear that being saved is not automatic. It takes effort.
- 'Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door'—the door is narrow in time, not in space. The door is small because it will close. For a while, the door is open. Whoever wants to do so can walk right in—as long as it's open. I think Jesus' answer to the man's question is: whoever cares enough to walk through the door while it's still open will be saved.
- 'where you come from'—basically, 'I'm sorry. Have we met?'
- 'weeping there, and gnashing of teeth'—weeping is an expression of sorrow; gnashing of teeth expresses anger. Some people will be sad, and others will be angry, to find that the door has closed.
- 'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'—these are the forefathers of the Jews, and the heirs of God's covenant, his offer of a special relationship. Jesus' listeners might have assumed that, because they are descendants of these men, they are automatically on the right side of the door. It doesn't work that way. Nowadays, most of us wouldn't look to our ethnic heritage—Jewish or otherwise—as proof of being 'on the inside' with God. We might be tempted to make a similar mistake, though, by pointing to being churchgoers, or religious, or 'good people,' or anything really, as the reason that we're automatically on the right side of the door. Jesus tells us that, no matter who we are, we need to decide to walk through the door. And it's to our peril if we assume that fitting into any particular category is the same thing.
- 'from east and west and north and south'—similar to yesterday's passage, we see that Jesus, in fact, expects many people to be rescued by God—just not the people who might assume they will be. People are streaming in from every direction, but not from the group of people Jesus is currently talking to.

## Taking It Home

- *For you:* We get the picture that following Jesus is about movement. To his questioner's frustration, Jesus resets the terms of salvation: it's not about being on one side of the door or the other but whether or not you are making steps towards it. What are the ways that God is asking you to move closer to him? Are there ways you have kind of just been sitting about and watching others? I get the picture of God hiking a mountain. He would love for us to join him but us saying 'Yes, I'll join you,' and then just taking a seat at the bottom of the trail, doesn't work so well. Ask God to show you how you might keep going in whatever stage of the journey you are at.
- *For your five:* Do your five feel excluded from places of faith? Pray that they would know that they in fact do have a place in this 'feast in the kingdom of heaven.' Ask God to show them that they are welcome in God's presence. Pray that God would create a space for them where they could explore faith.
- *For our church:* Ask God to guard our church as well as others from the temptation of judging one another and thinking that we are a leg-up in our thinking, or somehow have it all together. Pray that we would be increasingly consumed with actively following Jesus. Pray that Jesus would be our focus, and that we would be open to new ways God is working in our world.

## Sunday, March 22

### Luke 14:25-35

#### Points of Interest

- 'Large crowds were traveling with Jesus'—this time Jesus isn't just talking to the Twelve. He's making the same offer to everyone that he already made to the disciples.
- 'hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters'—I think Jesus is talking hyperbolically. I don't think he literally wants us to hate our families, any more than he literally, specifically requires that we carry a cross around in order to follow him. However, we can't just dismiss what Jesus is saying because he's saying it hyperbolically. He is, after all, using hyperbole to make a point. I think the point is that absolutely nothing, not the people closest to us, not even life itself, can take priority over following him.

- ‘Suppose one of you wants to build a tower’—I find it curious that Jesus chooses building a tower and conducting a war as his two examples. Pretty much no one listening to him has ever or will ever do either one of those things. Perhaps Jesus is trying to tell us that this is the biggest decision, by a large margin, we will ever make.
- ‘see if you have enough money to complete it’—a tower is a lot better than no tower, but half a tower is a lot of wasted effort for no gain at all. It could be argued that winning a war against an enemy nation would be better than not fighting one; losing a war is clearly far worse than not fighting one. We should be aiming at finishing, not starting. The big payoff in following Jesus comes from seeing it through to the end.
- ‘give up everything’—there’s no need to estimate the cost of following Jesus. It’s clear and simple: everything. On the minus side, it’s a pretty steep price tag. On the plus side, anyone can afford it.
- ‘if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?’—this isn’t just about them saving their own lives. They’re supposed to bring some seasoning, some flavor to the whole world. They’re supposed to make the world a different, better place. If they don’t do that, what good are they?
- ‘Whoever has ears to hear’—again, we see a combination of inclusiveness and exclusiveness to Jesus’ call. It’s thrown out to everyone, but you do actually need to respond to take advantage of the offer.

## Taking it Home

- *For you:* ‘Give up everything.’ That’s no small request! It’s also not entirely in with our culture, which famously encourages us to ‘consume’ and gain as much as we can. How do you feel about giving everything up for Jesus? Are there some particular things you don’t want to give up? While he seems to be asking a steep price, Jesus also promises that he is offering something to you in return. Talk to God about both of these things. First, tell God how you feel about this notion of ‘giving everything up’. Does the thought of giving everything over to God seem totally frightening? Are there a few key things that just seem to tough to let go of? Second, ask Jesus to make it clear what he is offering you in exchange. Ask him to understand what he is inviting you into. Ask him that to give you the courage to trust him and act on his offer.
- *For your five:* Pray today that God would encourage your five in any large projects or goals they have been pursuing. Pray for diligence and encouragement to finish well. Are there any dreams or hopes that your five have started only to make it half way. Ask that God would restore the dreams and hopes from long ago to your five.
- *For our church:* Salt is so unassuming—once added to food you can hardly ever see it, but you know it’s there, you know when it’s missing, and you can taste how it makes things better. Pray that our church would have that same presence in our city. Pray that we would play a vital role in contributing to and enhancing the well-being of our city.