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**Sunday 16 April 2023 to Sunday 23 April 2023**

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Sunday 16 April 2023

**True worship**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ (John 20:28)**

Read [John 20:19–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A19%E2%80%9331&version=NRSVUE)

I feel that Thomas often gets a bit unfairly treated by many readers of today’s passage. If we are honest with ourselves, many (if not most) of us would act no differently to Thomas in that position. Remember that people who are dead and buried do not then appear a couple of days later in the middle of the room. Plus, we all know how grief and despair can affect people. While Thomas probably accepted the common belief that God would resurrect the faithful – at the end of the current age – the temple was still standing, the corrupt religious leaders were still in place, and Rome still ruled. It very much seemed as though the current age was unchanged.

Besides, none of Jesus’ followers expected that following that horrendous death on the cross, Jesus would be walking around with them just days later!

However, when Thomas placed his eyes on the risen Jesus, all his scepticism disappeared. Notice what he then does. He makes one of the climactic proclamations of this gospel. One question that all the gospels want us to ask is, ‘Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?’ On Thomas’ lips, we have the answer that John’s Gospel has been arguing for from the prologue onwards: He is our Lord and our God.

We need to turn our eyes towards Jesus. We need to keep coming back to the cross. For, like Thomas, that is where we will find true worship. When we struggle to worship or find it difficult to pray or read the Scriptures, we need to come back to Jesus – hear his life, death and resurrection proclaimed again. This is one story we can never hear too often. Why not read chapters 1 and then 19 and 20 of the Gospel of John today – and focus on Jesus?

***God of Salvation, thank you for sending your dear Son to our sinful world so that he may live the life that I fail to, suffer my punishment for me, and bring me into your family. Forgive me when my questions cause me to doubt him. Through your Holy Spirit, keep me focused on my Lord Jesus each and every day. In his name, I pray. Amen.***

*Glenn Crouch was born in Brisbane, baptised in the Methodist Church, and married Karen in a Reformed Baptist Church. They moved to Kalgoorlie in Western Australia 37 years ago, where Glenn worked as a lecturer in computing. After serving as a Baptist pastor, Glenn joined the Lutheran Church with Karen in 1995. Glenn served as a lay preacher, which led to him becoming a Specific Ministry Pastor, and then a General Ministry Pastor. Recently Glenn and Karen have bundled everything up and moved to Esperance, Western Australia, where Glenn has his first full-time paid ministry role as pastor of St John’s in Esperance and St Paul’s in Kalgoorlie–Boulder.*

Monday 17 April 2023

**Rest and the word of God**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***For the word of God is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12a).***

Read [Hebrews 4:1–13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+4%3A1%E2%80%9313&version=NRSVUE)

I have recently had a period of rest forced upon me due to unexpected emergency surgery. This is not the sort of rest we read about today. Rather, the writer talks about entering into the rest of the Lord God. Notice that the writer refers us back to creation and, in the previous chapter, to the Exodus. We are briefly shown that the people of God, even under Joshua, failed to obtain this much-desired Sabbath rest.

However, like the people in the Old Testament, our souls also cry out for this Sabbath rest. The writer does not want their listeners to miss out. We, too, can miss out by taking our focus off Jesus, by neglecting time in prayer and with the Scriptures. Through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, we have access to the rest that God has promised – and the day will come when we fully enter that rest. But we can get distracted by the busyness of the world and the many idols we construct – the evil one does not want us entering into that Sabbath rest.

In the *Small Catechism*, when examining the commandment about the Sabbath, Martin Luther said, ‘We should fear and love God so that we may not despise preaching and his word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it’. Just like the writer to the Hebrews, he ties the Sabbath rest to God’s word. We need to read it, to hear it. We need to hear good solid preaching that points us to Jesus and his cross – and we need to hear this every week.

We are so blessed to have access to the written and proclaimed word of God in so many forms, yet how seldom do we take advantage of these resources? Use the blessings that God has provided so that your focus may remain on the word of God-made flesh: our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

***Creator God, thank you that, through your dear Son, I can share in your Sabbath rest. Forgive me for continuing to place things ahead of your word. Help me to better hear your Holy Spirit as he speaks through your word and leads me into your rest. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.***

Tuesday 18 April 2023

**The Great High Priest**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15a).***

Read [Hebrews 4:14 – 5:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+4%3A14+%E2%80%93+5%3A6&version=NRSVUE)

Today, we start with one of the major arguments of the writer to the Hebrews: that Jesus is our High Priest, and he is greater than any other priest.

When Jesus ascended (body and soul) into the heavenly realm, he took on the role of our Great High Priest. He is the one who stands before the Father on our behalf and proclaims that those who put their trust in him (Jesus) are forgiven – and have peace with God (Romans 5:1). As our High Priest, Jesus also reveals the Father to us. He shows us how much the Father loves us.

But the news gets even better! Our Lord Jesus was made flesh. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He lived the sort of life we all do – with the various challenges and difficulties we all face. He suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified. He died and was buried – until the Father raised him from the dead. Jesus was and is one of us. However, he is also God the Son. Through the incarnation, our Lord and Saviour is both fully God and fully man.

Think about this. Our High Priest understands us. He can relate to all we go through. Where we are weak, he is strong. We fail to save ourselves, but Jesus saved all of us and continues to be there for us!

***Heavenly Father, thank you for calling Jesus to be my Great High Priest. Thank you that through Jesus, I have confidence that you hear my prayers. Thank you that through his life, death and resurrection, not only do I have peace with you, but you look upon me with favour. Praise be to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus! Amen.***

Wednesday 19 April 2023

**Are we ready for solid food?**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***Once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:9).***

Read [Hebrews 5:7–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+5%3A7%E2%80%9314&version=NRSVUE)

When I was in the hospital recently, there was a slight mix-up, and for a couple of days, I was put on a liquid diet, even though this was not requested by the medical staff. When one of the more experienced nurses fixed the situation, I found the taste of solid food was so good!

The writer is talking about a situation where they want their hearers to desire solid food (good teaching about the gospel) and actively seek it. Not just sitting back and being fed like an infant. How much more does the Holy Spirit have to reveal to us? He is not going to force-feed us. Discipline is required from us. We must ‘Seek the Lord while he may be found’ (Isaiah 55:6).

But this is not where our passage begins. Rather, it starts with Jesus! It begins with our Great High Priest and how he suffered for us and obeyed his Father – so that through Jesus, eternal salvation would be obtained. How? By obeying him. No, I am not talking about salvation by works. It is Jesus who has done all that is needed. We just need to put our trust in him – and this means listening to what he says! For example, notice how often Jesus tells his disciples (and thus also us) to love one another – yet how often do we fail in this?

If you want solid food, you need to put your trust in Jesus daily, listen to him and do what he says. How can you grasp the gospel if you struggle to love one another?

***Father of my High Priest, forgive me for my laziness when it comes to the teaching of your dear Son. Create in me a strong desire to hear your word, learn more about the Bible, pray with you all the time, and worship and fellowship with my brothers and sisters. I ask this in Jesus' mighty name, Amen.***

Thursday 20 April 2023

**God is not unjust**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (Hebrews 6:12).***

Read [Hebrews 6:1–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+6%3A1%E2%80%9312&version=NRSVUE)

Today’s passage is not an easy one – and needs to be discussed in context with the rest of Hebrews and, of course, the rest of Scripture. So, a bit beyond the scope of a devotional!

We can see in it that the author wants to encourage their hearers to not give up. They point out that we need Christian mentors (both living and those with our Lord) that we can imitate. They will have their flaws, as they are not Jesus – but we can learn even through their flaws. Who are the Christians that you seek to imitate? I look for those who don’t point to themselves but instead point to Jesus, those who show forth the fruit of the Spirit, and those who aim to build up and encourage the body of Christ.

While many of my mentors over my 60-plus years with the Lord have continued to show forth his light, some have fallen badly. This has caused me great grief, but it has also reminded me that I, too, can fall; it reminds me that I need to be focused on Jesus. Pride can easily slip in such that our message becomes all about us. We need to always be pointing people to Jesus, both in our words and in our actions.

I hope that in this passage, you receive encouragement to be the person that other Christians can imitate. May Christ shine through you for others as you receive his light from those who spread it.

***Gracious God, mould me into the sort of person who shows forth the fruit of your Spirit to all I encounter. Help me speak and act as a follower of your dear Son. Forgive me for my failings in these areas. Grant me the boldness to get up and try again each and every day. Amen.***

Friday 21 April 2023

**The reliability of our God**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (Hebrews 6:19a).***

Read [Hebrews 6:13–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+6%3A13%E2%80%9320&version=NRSVUE)

I would like to look closer at what this passage has to say about hope. In Scripture, hope is a certainty we have because it is not tied to our wishes and dreams. Instead, it is based on who our God is. In our everyday speech, we often say things like ‘I hope it doesn’t rain’, ‘I hope my team wins’, or if we are told about something we don’t like, we respond ‘I hope not’. Our common usage is not the biblical concept of hope.

As we see in today’s passage, the writer looks back to Abraham and points out that his hope is based on the promise of God – who backs up his promise by swearing upon himself, as there is no one or nothing greater. Abraham’s hope is based on the reliability of his (and our) God.

Notice that the writer goes even further by saying that our Christian hope ensures that our soul is firmly and securely tied to Jesus – our Great High Priest. Our faith is firm because we place it in Jesus. Our salvation is secure because it is Jesus who has saved us.

God loves you. Jesus is your Lord and Saviour. The Holy Spirit is equipping you. These things are more certain than that the sun will rise in the morning.

***Merciful Father, when doubts and fears overcome me, restore my focus on the cross. Renew in me the hope that your dear Son has achieved on my behalf. Remind me of the forgiveness available through his death and resurrection. In Jesus' mighty name, I pray. Amen.***

Saturday 22 April 2023

**How do I thank the Lord?**

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

***I love the Lord, for he heard my voice (Psalm 116:1a).***

Read [Psalm 116:1–4,12–19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+116%3A1%E2%80%934%2C12%E2%80%9319&version=NRSVUE)

The psalmist has turned to the Lord God for help and has been saved. How do they repay the Lord for all that they receive? As we read through the passage for today, and as the psalmist lists the various things they will do, it keeps coming across as not enough – as though they realise that their praise, offerings, obedience and service all pale in comparison to all that the Lord has done for them.

While in its original context, this psalm may have been used for the nation of Israel to celebrate the Passover, Martin Luther saw it more as the Christian’s response to the work of our Redeemer – Jesus Christ. We cannot and could not save ourselves from our sins. We were dead, and he gave us life. Our response is that we sing praises to Jesus; we want to follow him and obey his commands; we want to tell others about Jesus; we want to be more like him. However, how is this enough? Our Lord did not save us so we could pay him back – any more than God saved the psalmist expecting an equitable return.

How great is our God! How deep is our Saviour’s love! As we slowly come to understand how great the grace of God is, our hearts burst forth with praise and thanks. Perhaps this psalm could be your prayer of thanks today?

***Merciful and loving Father, I cannot begin to comprehend how much you have done and continue to do for me. May my ears be opened to the Holy Spirit as he continuously reveals your amazing grace and continues to point me to my Lord and Saviour, nailed to a tree. Praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Sunday 23 April 2023

**The road to Emmaus**

by Dianne Eckermann

***They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’ (Luke 24:32)***

Read [Luke 24:13–35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24%3A13-35&version=NRSVUE)

Luke’s Gospel mentions several occasions when Jesus meets people on the road. Today’s reading focuses on his encounter with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. The meeting itself is important, but it is also symbolic of a bigger journey as the two disciples are on a journey of discovery about Jesus.

Cleopas and his companion unwittingly become witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. On their travels, they discuss the distressing events that had just occurred in Jerusalem, namely the crucifixion of Jesus. They are slightly incredulous that the stranger they meet on the road does not seem to know what has been happening, and they ironically explain to Jesus what they know of his death and the disappearance of his body.

However, this stranger was able to open Scripture for them. They listen with such interest to what he has to say that their hearts burn within them. Finally, when realisation dawns that this unknown stranger is the risen Christ, they journey straight back to Jerusalem to tell what they now know of the much bigger journey Jesus is travelling.

If Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple were on a road trip in modern times, their journey would have been entirely different. Instead of walking along the road to Emmaus, they would be driving in air-conditioned comfort, missing tiny details of the landscape, such as wildflowers, insects or small animals. In addition to missing the natural world, it is likely they would miss their encounter with the risen Christ.

Our busy modern lives can leave little room for time with Jesus. The world presents us with so many other priorities that seem pressing. The two disciples, left in awe after their encounter on the road to Emmaus, are a reminder for us all to slow down, journey with Jesus and allow his words to burn in our hearts too.

***Dear Jesus, we ask you to open our eyes so we can see you and open our ears so we can hear your words and recognise you in all we do in our busy world. Amen.***

*Dianne has served in Lutheran education as a teacher, school leader and system leader at Lutheran Education Australia. Now retired from full-time work, she continues to volunteer on several committees and as a school board member. She lives in the Adelaide Hills with her husband, Robert, and is in strong demand as a babysitter for her three grandchildren.*