

Summary

Each of the following devotions are intended to captivate the heart by searching God's word and causing a collision of spirit and mind with the person of Jesus Christ.

These devotions track through the book of John through 3 groups of seven. The "I am" statements are a traditionally recognized grouping of seven as well as the seven miracles. I've adapted encounters with Christ to collect 3 total groupings, each with an intro day...making the total 8 devotions per week, 24 total.

Instructions

1. Read the passage for the day
2. Read the devotion
3. Spend time with God in Prayer

Week 1 – Encountering Christ

Day 1 - John 1:1-18 – The Word became Flesh

Like a match hitting gasoline, verse 1 and 14 produce a powerful reaction if we read them together. To say the "Word is God" is enough to make your mind spin. Even if you rightly understand this to be talking about the Son of God, comprehending the different persons of the trinity might be to many the same as understanding Einstein's theories on quantum physics. So, to then comment later that this Word *became flesh*; well now we've launched into the stratosphere of what even the sharpest minds can grasp.

And yet there it is, this remarkable truth we know refers to none other than Jesus, the Nazarene. In him we see God...and in him we see man. However remarkable it may be, we must first stand back in awe and worship. This one who would take on humanity, would sit with the lowly like us, while granting us vision into something the prophets of old longed for; sight of God himself. He is the Ancient of Days, *and* the human King from David's line. He is the God-man.

As we look forward to Easter, our first step must be one of faith. But as we seek him, this one who would become the grave opener, we are offered this promise; when we look upon him, we will see glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. So, let us now, as the old hymn says, "turn our eyes upon Jesus" and encounter him face to face.

Day 2 - John 1:19-34 – John the Baptist

Does the sun ask the candle how to shine? Does a sunflower stoop to see the growth of the dandelion? Has there ever been an ocean to inquire of the pond, how do your waters move? Indeed not. In fact, we innately recognize the greatness of one over the other. In the same way

we are spellbound by an orchestra and yet stand for the conductor. The applause of the first is drowned out by the ovation for the second.

When John the Baptist tells of seeing Christ come forward for baptism, he relates how he knew that Christ was greater than himself, because God showed the Spirit, like a dove, resting on him. John knew by this that he was the Son of God. So, when seeing Christ again, it was no difficulty for him to look at his disciples and point them towards Jesus. John understood his role. "I came baptizing so he might be revealed to Israel."

As a candle in the darkness makes us long for the sunrise, so John made the people long for Christ. As the dandelion is a smaller picture of the sunflower it mimics, so the triumphs in your life may be worth sharing, but only in so much as they point to the triumph of the empty tomb. This Easter, remember oh image bearer that your reflection reminds us of the ocean of his grace. This season give Christ all the glory and take your seat behind the majesty of the risen, standing Lord.

Day 3 - John 1:35-42 – Peter and Andrew

What's an experience you've had that you immediately had to tell someone about? Sometimes it's something so shaping that you can't even wait till you see them. Picture Andrew then, urgently trying to find Peter, to tell him that he had met Jesus.

Imagine what it must have been like for Simon Peter to hear those words of his brother. "We have found the Messiah." If he's wrong, it's a story to tell later, about how dramatic his brother was being. If he's right, they would never be the same.

At some point, if you're a true follower of Christ, someone introduced you to Jesus, and your life was changed forever. Just as Simon's name was shifted forever, so your life was given a new name, as child of God.

As we look forward to easter, the celebration of the finished work of this Messiah, we look forward though not only to remembering how we've been changed like Peter...but we intentionally become like our brother Andrew, who's first reaction was to tell of the person he'd met. These next weeks, pray intentionally that with every encounter your heart has with Christ, you might become the voice of hope to a world waiting for deliverance, and that you'll have the strength to cry out boldly...we have found him.

Day 4 - John 1:43-50 - Phillip and Nathaniel

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" You have to admire Nathaniel's honesty. In fact, it would seem that Jesus does! He calls him a true Israelite with no deceit, reminiscent of God changing Jacob to Israel, a deceitful cheat to a faithful father. What Nathaniel sees is not what he had imagined. He had opened an old Nazarene trunk in the proverbial attic and was shocked at what he found. This man knew his thoughts and had even seen him before they met. This conversation alone would leave someone in wonder, and indeed it does. Nathaniel exclaims that he must be the Son of God, the King they had waited for; the Messiah.

But as Jesus always has a way of doing, he takes hold of the sparkle in our eyes over an earthly thing and beckons our sight to reach beyond the horizon to something eternal. Jesus says to this descendant of Jacob, that he would see what his ancestor Israel had seen. That night, Jacob dreamed of his ladder and angels going up and down to heaven...but Nathaniel, this honest Israelite, would see something even greater.

The Son of Man is Jesus, becoming at his death the doorway to heaven. Through his blood Christ offered forgiveness yes, but also became the ladder by which we come to God. Jesus was inviting Nathaniel. Inviting him to witness the greatest miracle the world would ever know, the death and resurrection of the Son of God. As you look towards Easter, remember the breaking of the seal on that garden tomb in turn sealed our invitation to follow the risen savior, that we might become true Israelites, with no deceit or sin.

Day 5 - John 3:1-15 - Nicodemus

Imagine the courage of the old teacher. This ruler, Nicodemus, had found the question he could not answer, the unsolvable riddle. And though he believed in God, he could believe the reports. So, with determination and humility, he came to the source, like a boy to his Father, hoping for understanding. Only more questions came. How could someone be born again?! In human terms, this was incomprehensible. It must have been disheartening, to be greeted with more puzzles.

As he lay his mind to rest that night, it's uncertain if he believed. And yet, we do know that he came to Jesus' defense a year later (John 7:50). And even still when Jesus had completed his work on the cross, there were but two who stood to bury his body. Nicodemus was one. That burial night he again walked home in the darkness, having left in the cold tomb the only one who had ever taught this teacher.

But what was sown in the darkness of a tomb on Friday, came ever shining and clear in the light of Sunday morning. At the gaze of the empty tomb, what was dim became sharp. Jesus came out of the grave like he was being born again. Paul calls him the firstborn from the dead, and where there is a firstborn there are other children, and indeed it is so. For when we hone in on the empty grave, and belief floods our hearts, we too are born again by the Holy Spirit's power into the family of God.

This Easter, bring your questions, bring your fear. Bring your doubt and your uncertainty. Let them roll away with the stone.

Day 6 – John 4 – The Woman at the Well

The words, "Go call your husband" must have been deafening to her...catching her so off tilt she readily admitted to this Jewish stranger she had none. And then in one fall swoop, Jesus exposed her life, past and present.

At the well, the woman met in Jesus the two things she longed to hide from: men and God. But like a masterful shepherd, leading to greener pastures, Christ offered this woman something her soul had forgotten she needed; true life. But to receive the refreshment he offered she would have to admit the thirst. There were a few things to let go of, but if she only knew who was speaking, she'd gladly give it all. Any doctor can offer a diagnosis but only a surgeon can remove the problem. And while this physician's touch is not without pain, the healer was offering himself as the remedy.

A true encounter with Christ will always be, at the very least, exposing. As Adam and Eve stepped out from behind the foliage and met God in their shame, we too who would deal with Christ must ready ourselves to face not only Him but our true selves. When we come to the open mouth of the garden grave, we must be realistic about what caused his death; my sin and yours. We must acknowledge our lack, our thirst, to truly embrace the water of life he would freely give. But by the grace of God, if we linger before rolled away stone, we will hear the voice of the one who makes us whole saying, "I who speak to you, am He".

Day 7 - John 8:1-11 – The Woman Forgiven

In this passage there is a missing character. Like something that's been moved but you don't notice right away, it's subtle, but the question undoubtedly forms in the back of a reader's mind on the second or third pass by.

Where was the man? In adultery there are two offending parties. And by law, they were to *both* be stoned. And while the leaders were passionate in their upholding one half of the law, were unwilling or unable to bring full justice. So was the one willing to lay with her in bed, now unwilling or unforced to sit with her in shame. And so here she was, alone.

And yet she wasn't, was she? Knelt next to her was her maker. Knelt next to her was the Christ, the first comforter. What had escaped the scribes and pharisees that day is that the very Word of God stood before them. He was not like them, a student of the word...he was its author, nay its embodiment. They meant to entrap him with his own law, but he meant to fulfill it.

And so stepped in Jesus, the forgiver and the judge. The only one worthy to say, "I do not condemn you", and yet also "go sin no more." She was left alone as the adulteress but protected boldly by an advocate. Further still his life would show he was the only one qualified to be both. Only he was able to take sin on himself, and yet conquer it by rising again. And only he could administer justice, having been justified in his resurrection. Loud were the accusations that day. But even louder was the silence of each retreating footstep and each stone that one by one hit sand. Still it echoed of that future stone which would rumble away for good, as the roaring lion took his place among the living to be our advocate, judge, and King.

Day 8 - John 7:40-44 – The Crowd

As Jesus walked the dusty streets of Judea, he was not unnoticed. People clamored to him, some to listen, some to critique and still others watching for their time to arrest him.

But regardless the motivation of the single person, the crowd that encountered Christ had to reckon with his presence. His dynamic teaching was paired with the explosiveness of his person. Some responded thinking him a prophet, some correctly knew him as the Christ, but still others believed him a fraud. And as we read of the division of the crowd, we see the reflection of crisis in the heart of every individual facing God incarnate. What will we do with him? He could be deceiving everyone. He could simply be crazy. On the cross these propositions seemed almost likely. But they were only options until the tomb lay empty. When the grave let him free, as the sun rose that easter morn, all shadows of assessment and argument fell aside. Yes a prophet, yes a teacher, yes the Christ. But more than that; He is Lord of Life. We too then who bear his name this season must walk as he did. As missionary Jim Elliot famously wrote in his journal, so we must pray, "Father, make of me a crisis man. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that men must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me."

Week 2 – The Miracles of Christ

Day 9 - John 10:38 – The Miracle Worker

We were made to be awestruck by our creator. Meanwhile sin threatens to steal the joy we find in marveling at our God. The people of Jesus' day were forced to reckon with his power, commanding in nature what only a creator could. As we read the gospels, we too must reckon with this miracle worker.

He who turned water into wine and healed the sick. He who told the lame to stand. He who fed over five thousand and walked upon the water. He who reversed blindness and who shouted into the corridors of death, "Lazarus, come forth!". 7 signs of Jesus. As he had spoken at the beginning, creating the world in 7 days, so now he re-created in seven moments. The genesis of the new creation had begun. But make no mistake, as miraculous as they were, these seven are just the backdrop. These are the precursors to the main event. On the last day of the week after Golgotha, the tomb was still closed, the old way of death still intact. Oh, but the eighth day, the first of that new week...the creator stepped out into what was becoming a new world.

One day in glory there will be no end to the wonder of what Jesus has done. The books could not contain his glorious feats. The miracle of our salvation will be buffeted by the stories of his works in ages past. And like a river leading to a waterfall, we will anticipate the climactic rush and cry with trembling voices, "Jesus, tell us about the tomb again, and how empty it still is!" And we will shout forever the miracle of the risen Son of God.

Day 10 - John 2:1-12 – Water to Wine

In the ancient garden, the man and woman came together and God performed the first wedding. And yet here in Cana, we find Jesus, the God-man, a mere attendee. Or was he? Unlike the rest of his ministry, he would go mostly unnoticed at this event. Little did the bride and groom know that day, that the creator of marriage itself was in their midst. And yet, when the point of crisis rose, so too did Christ to act. In one moment, what was water so clear now rippled red brimming over.

It was his first miracle, but it would not be his last. He would make his pledge of blood on calvary's hill washed with the same color of that wedding wine. And with the triumphant exit from the grave, Jesus extended in that garden just as he did in the first, an invitation to a marriage supper. But this time it was his own.

The circular shadow of the grave's open mouth stands like a ring of promise to Christ's betrothed. Will you turn from sin and sadness? Will you give all of yourself and trust in him alone? What was offered in his passion was promised that day in Cana. What we hope for one day in the wedding feast was foreshadowed as the host exclaimed that the better wine was saved for last. And with every taste of new wine on that joyful day, one message rang loudly with the wedding bells in harmony; the groom has arrived.

Day 11 - John 4:46-54 – The Official's Son

When you read the words, "He came again to Cana," your heart rate should elevate at the imminent, pervasive thought, "he's going to do it again." Once more at the scene of his first miracle, God begins to work a second.

In taking on human flesh Christ became, in his humanity, as limited to time and space and we are. And yet when asked to travel and heal, he did not move. He, like at creation, spoke a word instead. This was no word of prophetic prediction, but a declaration of deliverance. And just as his promises have always been, so here the same is true; they are as sure the moment they are spoken as they will ever be. The son of the official rose immediately to the Son of God's call. Space did not inhibit him, nor did time deter him, for he created both.

What resulted will resound for eternity. The man, the son, and the *entire* family believed Jesus. The incredible super-nature of how it had happened was overshadowed by the firm conviction that Jesus' words were true, from the very moment they were uttered.

Just as the scene of the first miracle in your new life with him is built upon the belief that God raised him from the dead and the declaration that he is Lord, so now Christ beckons you return to the open garden tomb. He asks that you remember the promise God has made; to take what seems to be dying and with one word, cause it to live again.

Day 12 - John 5:1-17 – The Man at the Pool

God is not done working for you. Do you believe that?

We don't know much about this man's condition, but we are told how long he has been there.

38 years.

By the time we find the man, he leads a life of miserable repetition, no longer believing that he could be healed.

He had no one to carry him...or so he thought.
God was not working for him...or so he thought.

And 38 years is a long time to sit with one's own thoughts.

Many of us are in this place, sitting in the 38th year, wondering why God has left us here.

But lift your eyes brothers and sister because...

What the man didn't know, 31 years prior, was that a baby was born just 5 miles away.

He didn't know that this strong carpenter standing now in front of him was that boy. He had been anointed by the Spirit, in preparation for the day he would step into that colonnade and look him in his tired eyes and say, "do you want to be healed?"

God never stops working for his children. You may not know *when* you are in your journey, but trust him...he does. And *wherever* you are, hear the voice of Jesus calling to you, "My Father is working until now...and I am working"

And just like Christ carried this man's ailment to the cross so we need only to be carried to calvary where all our infirmities were laid on the one who would lay them aside in an empty grave. There and only there, can we too be made whole.

Day 13 - John 6:1-15 – Feeding the 5,000

Have you ever wondered why there were leftovers? It's safe to accept that the mention of the scraps cannot be any more wasteful on the author's part than the food itself was to the disciples. The details matter to John. He places them skillfully, like Michelangelo before the David, carving marks and features for the advantage of the reader.

Did you notice Jesus asks Phillip a question, not because he needs to know the answer but because of who he sounds like? It's almost an identical question to the one Moses asks God in

the wilderness. He can't feed the people and has no idea how he's going to. When God does feed the people in the wilderness do you remember how much they had left over? None. In fact, if they took more than they needed, it would spoil!

With these similarities it's no wonder that the people acknowledge determinedly that Jesus is *The Prophet*, the new and better Moses. Because this time, Jesus knows exactly how he will feed them. And still Jesus tells the disciples to pick up the leftovers. These twelve new representatives of Israel fill the same number of baskets.

The miracle of feeding the people is one of extraordinary abundance. In the wilderness God showed them they needed him alone. Jesus is showing them that if they partake in him alone, they will NEVER be unsatisfied. He will not just give them life, he will give them resurrected, empty tomb, never going back again, abundant kind of life. He will use words to say he's the bread of life. He performed this miracle to show us how satisfying the bread is.

Day 14 - Jn 6:16–21 – Calming the Storm

"Do not be afraid," he told them.

What resolve had held in the storm, fear overtook at the sight of someone upon the waters. While they might have hoped for God's deliverance, the men rocking in the boat certainly would not have expected him to come walking past. This was, simply put, impossible. No one walked on water. But he, stepping atop molecules whose structure he was at that very moment sustaining, was unaffected by the pummeling waves.

"It is I," he said, and suddenly all was well.

In this water walking man we feel tremors of another day and another sea where Israel's 12 felt certain they were about to meet their doom. But just as God's footprints were unseen on the path through the sea out of Egypt, so now the footprints of the carpenter left no mark upon the waves he had made. The "I am" was doing it again, placing his 12 in the uncertain waters to make clear his glorious might. And here, without the crowds, he had something to show them of his power.

Let us then lean into the waves which bring us close to Christ. Whether the middle of the night upon stormy waters, or Saturday evening where the tomb still lays closed, know this: The tomb did not stay filled, nor will the night last forever. But it will not be wasted. And just perhaps it is precisely there, and not another place, where he would gladly show you his might.

Day 15 - John 9:1-41 – The Blind Man

We've all at one time or another experienced the relationship of cause and effect. To the Pharisees and even the disciples, this relationship seemed so clear here. Sin caused the blindness - either his parent's or his own. But Jesus has a different answer.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus is hardly ever doing just one thing? As he spat on the ground to cover the man's eyes, he's displaying something to uncover ours...

Christ doesn't want merely to reverse the effects of the fall. He wants to extinguish the root of the curse itself. The true captive is not the blind man, but the ones who thought they understood. Those sitting in judgement were incapable of seeing the truth of who walked among them.

And so Jesus came back to the man a second time to make one thing clear; this miracle was not meant to merely heal eyesight, but to return him to the maker of eyes.

And with the man we say confidently, "one thing I know, that though I was blind now I see". And when people ask us how he did it, this man from galilee...we will respond in triumph that just as the blind man came to wash in the pool, Jesus bid me come to calvary, and though it cost him everything, for me it was free to wash. And because he did not stay dead, so neither did I, and if you trust him, he will come and take your blinded eyes and cause you to see again.

Day 16 - John 11 – Lazarus

This miracle with Lazarus was the most dynamic display of the power of life over death since the world began until that day. Since our first parents' sin, death had reigned supreme. Now, as the second Adam stood outside the tomb, he was positioned to reclaim the light that Eden lost. And yet, when Lazarus came out of that grave, it was only a mere shadow of what was to come. They took the wrappings off his body yes, but he brought them out of the tomb. Sadly, he would need them once more, because for Lazarus there was a death still yet to die. But Jesus, when he came out of the tomb, left his death clothes there, folded in place, for he would be needing them no more. This Jesus died once and will never die again.

No one can escape death, but he comes to us all. The question of death is not if, and no one can know the when. The question is, in whose hands will you place your trip to the grave; your own or in the one person who can bring you out?

We need not fear death, in whatever form he comes. He will not win, after all is said and done. For the final words have already been spoken; "It is finished" upon the cross. In Israel *today* there is an empty grave, that no matter how hard he try, the enemy cannot fill it again with your sin or with mine.

In the garden tomb we have the assurance, that Christ stands over death. In Lazarus' tomb we have the proof, that he will apply it to us as well.

Week 3 – The Identity of Christ

Day 17 - Exodus 3:13-14 - John 8:48-59 – Who is He?

"Who is this King of Glory?" wrote David in Psalm 24. And the question penned there was no less pertinent when Jesus the Nazarene began his ministry. The boy from Bethlehem, the carpenter's son, was a mystery to many he confronted. And yet it was not for lack of sharing who he was. While complex, his own statements of who he was were not muddled or unclear. He declared himself plainly to those who would listen. John records for us seven "I am" statements that Jesus made throughout his life. And when we read these statements, we are intended to hear the echo of that burning bush atop the mountain saying, "I AM who I AM". It is the claim of ultimate self-existence. It is the claim of a self-sustaining one, one of self-sufficiency; none other than God himself. Jesus did not speak in riddle, so none could understand. He spoke in language and pictures that reverberated of the scriptures from ages past. So, we ask, who is this king of glory, the one who calms the seas? Who is this king of glory to whom demons listen and flee? Who is this King of glory who sets our hearts ablaze, when the stone rumbles and he opens up the grave? It is Jesus, the Son of God...YAHWEH, the one burning in the bush...I AM.

Day 18 - John 6:32-35 – Bread of Life

To be hungry is to be human. It is a peculiar thing that God made us this way and yet he did. He built it in to our very fabric; weakness. We tire and must sleep. We thirst and must drink. And in order to live, we must eat. As the Israelites wandered the wilderness and needed bread only he could provide, so still does God create in us a spiritual hunger which only he can satisfy. It's in the mirror of this weakness that we so clearly see the strength of God himself. What will fill that void we sense? It will not be our efforts or work. It will only be by God's grace, that we are content, full, whole. God could have made us differently, as much as he could have made butterflies to fly from birth instead of cocooning. But He has made us weak, so that in the purposes of his grace, we might know him to be pleasing all the more. It was his grace for the wilderness wanderers, and his grace still to the one in the wilderness of the soul. Don't rebel against your weakness for it is there that God will meet you. He proved just that in Christ. God himself, clothed in human weakness, walked every step of Calvary. There, the bread of life was broken to forgive, and in his rising, he renews our hearts that we could forever dine with him. Come today to heaven's manna, and you will never hunger again.

Day 19 - John 8:12-20 – Light of the World

Just like hearing a voice call out to you in the darkness, knowing the speaker changes what you feel about the voice. Jesus here doesn't leave it to guesswork though. He tells them plainly who he is. Mirroring his first words in creation, the author of life speaks again of light...but this time not to make it, but to show that he embodies it. Light doesn't just come from him...he is the

light. So, when we read the phrase, “Jesus spoke to them again,” we read it as declaration of a continued pursuit that was first inaugurated in the darkness of a Bethlehem night. A sinful darkness loving people had been infiltrated by the source of light itself. Continually they rejected him but again and again Jesus spoke. Again, and again, he healed, delivered, and comforted. Those trapped in darkness did not understand him and so eventually they would try to snuff him out. But the tomb meant to hold him forever in darkness proved to be the very stage for the light’s most glorious appearance. The first day darkness stayed, and the second day darkness held, but the third day something happened that changed the world forever. THE LIGHT STARTED SHINING AGAIN!

We are no longer now citizens of a kingdom of darkness, but God has taken us, like he did the first man, and placed us in his kingdom of light. And our inheritance is sure...we will dwell with him forever, the light of the world.

Day 20 - John 10:1–10 – The Gate

Consider what you would do for someone that belonged to you; A spouse, a sibling, a child. Now ponder the urgency of Jesus to protect his sheep. In Jesus day, a typical sheep pen would have been, essentially, a stone wall built up about three feet high to protect the sheep from predators or thieves. In even the larger pens there would have likely only been one gate, highlighting Jesus words that anyone who didn’t come through it was a robber. In being the gate, Jesus is identifying himself as the guardian of the sheep, the single barrier between them and all that might threaten them. He, unlike the thief, is interested in providing for the well-being of the sheep. His love and protection ring out most clear with the words, “I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.” But we must enter through him, not hop the wall. Even as the sheep of Christ, we must still avoid the fatal mistake of believing we are in control. We have put all of our hope in one person’s claim that he can guard us forever, and it's not ourselves...it’s Jesus. If we enter through him though, the outcome is clear. We will be saved...we will go in and out and find pasture. As the tomb closed shut, Jesus was finishing his work to open wide the gate for his sheep. In his death we see forgiveness granted to the sheep. In his resurrection we see the paradise of new life opened for them to enter.

Day 21 - John 10:11-15 – The Good Shepherd

If you were to travel to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and shout as loud as you could, for moments following the echoes would make it seem as if the canyon walls were talking back to you. If you were to then turn your attention in detail to the rising cliffs you would be overcome by how remarkably old they were. These old speaking walls, if they could truly talk, would have a thousand tales to tell.

When Jesus tells the people he is the good shepherd...of course they hear him speak, but they’re also hearing echoes from their history.

Mixed in this song were somber notes of their own shepherds’ failures. The prophets, talking directly to Israel’s leaders, had spoken of how the shepherds had abandoned their post. Following suit, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were nothing more than blind guides trying to

lead blind sheep. Jesus statement positions himself against both; a hope despite their past and an oasis in their present.

But some notes rang of goodness. They heard the shepherd boy David, and his ferocity to protect his sheep. They heard that great king's longing for the Lord to lead him to still waters as he had led so many sheep to pasture. Since the time of David, the shepherd boy who became King, God's people had anticipated a future king like their ancestor. Imagine the joy as some realized that day...he had arrived, the shepherd of Judah, who would rise again to lead his sheep.

Day 22 - John 11:1-44 – Resurrection and the Life

Why did he let Lazarus die? The question is as important here as it is in your heart today. Why does death remain? Why must we endure the final blow of the curse and feel so vividly its' affects while still living? Jesus told his disciples in verse 4 that Lazarus death was happening so that the "Son of God might be glorified through it." Could this not still be true? Could there be a peculiar glory in this dying that does not end in death; in making something seem so permanent only to show his power in the reversal? Perhaps it is just so that the Lord of Life, the one who is called *the resurrection*, uses even death for his beauty. We see here the graveside of Lazarus is the backdrop for Christ's voice of life to call him out. In the same way, the whole event is the precursor to his own more glorious display of might. This would come after Calvary, when that same Word of God came booming again from the canvas of a bodiless cave.

Brothers and sisters, as painful as it is...it will be upon the stage of our tombstones that Christ will show himself forevermore to be the true resurrection. Even then, in suffering we believe him, and in death we trust him. Because as the trumpet sounds our bones will rattle, and life will course our veins once more. It is Christ's final victory cry over death, saying you could not hold me and you will not keep those that are mine. That final breath then for every believer is our final act of faith...our final whisper in agreement with Christ, "The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live."

Day 23 - John 14:1-7 – The Way, The Truth, The Life

As Jesus word's most always did, they answered the very predicament their soul felt and yet their mouth had not admitted. "Don't let your heart be troubled," he urged, and yet how could they not be? Three years they had walked the Judean hills watching Jesus work and joining his kingdom inauguration. And now he was leaving. Not just leaving though...he was leaving *them*. They can sense the precipice of the unknown and they wish nothing more than to be with Christ. Enter Thomas, asking what was on everyone's mind. If we don't know the *where*, how can we possibly know the *way to the where*?

Perhaps because we know where this story is leading, we hesitate to answer this question ourselves. But simply because a believer knows the destination is heaven does not answer Thomas' query. How will you arrive at glory? When the end comes to you, what will carry you passed into heaven's gates?

The majesty of Christ's response is that it reveals not a what but a who. Sitting there in front of them was both their desired destination and their means of transport. We, like the disciples, know the way to God already. We who are "in Christ" know the mercy not of him pointing us to somewhere, but rather carrying us himself. He does not only make the way, by his resurrection triumph. And he does not only prepare the place with his heavenly priesthood. He is the way to our Father. And when we see the truth that he embodies, we see life everlasting.

Day 24 - John 15:1-11 – The Vine

We love to do. Our hearts, affected by the curse, love the rigid call to performance. The double-edged sword of duty, though, produces both pride and shame. We give ourselves to pride when we see our labors succeeding, while debilitated with shame over our imperfections. The lesson of the vine is a sledgehammer to the hard-heartedness of our love for achievement, though Jesus is not the first to implement the word picture. The Psalmist and Jeremiah both speak of Israel as God's vine, but their commentary is less than flattering. The people are rebuked for not producing fruit, living in rebellion to the vinedresser. And so by his own declaration, Jesus is not merely another vine. He's the *true* vine. The full reflection of gardener, for he can produce what no other can. In fact we realize that this was exactly God's intention in displaying Israel as the fruitless vine; to highlight all the more the abundance of Christ's fruitfulness. This last identity statement of Christ leaves us with a system shocking reality. We are not meant to produce our own fruit. We cannot. What then? We abide, resting in the work of the vine. We don't strive. This is not for us. We rest. Rest today then in the finished work of Jesus, in his blood bought forgiveness, his sin finishing burial and his death defeating resurrection. And as open as that tomb still remains, so stands Christ's invitation to the weary branch, to lay down their exertion, and rest.