



Luke 23

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵² Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

John 19

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been

laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Mark 15

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Matthew 27

⁵⁷ As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹ Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ and placed it in his own new

tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

Arimathea was a small town not too far from Jerusalem. Joseph, a member of the Council or the Sanhedrin, would have been in Jerusalem for Passover. The Council or Sanhedrin was a gathering of the leaders of Judea made up of people from all the regions around Israel. The power of Judaism lay within the Sanhedrin as the judicial body that made decisions as a group. This group veiled individuals bent on carrying out personal vendettas against problem people.

We don't know when or how, but Joseph had seen Jesus in action. He had heard Him teach. Maybe Joseph and Nicodemus were friends. We can only guess. But something had happened to Joseph that convinced him to risk everything he had earned in getting into the Sanhedrin.

Joseph was willing to be unclean for seven days for Jesus. What does that mean? If he was following the Law of the time, because he had touched a dead body, he would need to follow some ritual cleanings to become clean again and reenter the city and his

home. Two ritual cleanings over 7 days, to be restored. Joseph chose this, to honor Jesus.

He also risked his reputation and status among his fellow members of the Sanhedrin. This was a huge event; word would have gotten around that Joseph was the one who took Jesus' body down.

Could he keep his role as a Jewish leader? Probably not. Could he continue to worship in the synagogue? Probably not. Would his friends on the Council still associate with him? Probably not.

"Again, I tell you it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven..."

Joseph was rich. But he didn't let that stop him from being obedient to what God asked him to do. He set aside all of that and fixed his eyes on Jesus, not concerning himself with the consequences that would come from his actions.

Jesus did the same thing for us.

He willingly and knowingly gave all even though He knew the consequences.

It may sound weird to us that Joseph put Jesus' body in a tomb he had purchased. But during this time families generally had one tomb they used for all of their burials, so the tomb was reused often.

Once a body had decayed fully, the bones were gathered and placed in a box at the back of the tomb.

Jesus' family likely had a tomb, but it would have been in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem. Since it was Friday when Jesus died, the family wouldn't have had time to get the body home before the Sabbath started since the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday. Joseph's tomb seemed to be pretty close to Golgotha and a convenient place to put Jesus.



A burial tomb would have looked similar to this in Jesus' day. Joseph would have been able to roll the stone in place by himself because of how the system was designed. The stone rolled into a pocket in front

of the opening so it's easy to get the stone there, but hard to move it back open.

This was primarily to prevent grave robbers from being able to disturb tombs easily.

DISCUSS;

1. Has God ever challenged you to do something for Him that might lead to a change in your status? Your friendships? Your family?
2. Did you obey God? Why or why not?
3. Were the consequences what you expected?
4. Has God ever challenged you to give up something of value to you to serve Him?

²¹ Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials. ²² But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road.

²⁴ Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again.

²⁶ Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. ²⁸ Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

²⁹ Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

³⁰ The donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?”

“No,” he said.

³¹ Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

³² The angel of the Lord asked him, “Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. ³³ The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it.”

³⁴ Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, “I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back.”

³⁵ The angel of the Lord said to Balaam, “Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.” So Balaam went with Balak’s officials.

This is a complicated story. We jump into it with the text above, but a lot has already happened.

A guy named Balak was the king of Moab at this point in time. The Moabites were terrified of the Israelites because of the victories they had been winning against the people groups around Moab.

So the King, Balak, sent his messengers to bring a man named Balaam to him to help them. We don't get a ton of background on Balaam, he just shows up at this point. But when the King's men show up at his house, he declares he must seek the Lord as to what to do, so the men need to spend the night.

God speaks directly to Balaam and tells him not to go with the men. Balaam sends the men off, but they come back again. Balaam seeks the Lord again and this time God tells him he can go with them, but can only say what He tells him to.

What leads up to the passage here is Balaam asking the same question of God again after God had answered Balaam very clearly.

Asked and answered, "Why do you ask of God again?"

It's like the child who wants their way, and they are just trying to wear down the parent by asking the same question repeatedly. Frustration can build and "yes" isn't an answer as much as a relief.

God is annoyed by Balaam coming back to ask the same question again.

This is a wildly spectacular story where God uses a donkey for His purposes.

Can God use anyone or anything regardless of their story and background for His purposes and our good? He used a donkey. So yes.

Donkey highlights:

The donkey could talk.

The donkey could see things that were going on that Balaam was blind to.

The donkey was protecting its owner.

Balaam was oblivious to all of it and was wholly focused on where he was going. Maybe for the reward, maybe because he felt honored being summoned by a king, or maybe because he didn't want to look stupid.

Balaam's desire to not look stupid, maybe even his compulsion to not be considered foolish in front of these important people, caused him to unleash fury on the one thing in the story that was for him.

It's safe to say that we sometimes respond without having all the information. We don't completely understand what is happening, but we have an

opinion. Maybe the goal is to protect ourselves from looking stupid. Maybe it's to not look foolish before important people. Regardless of why, we will often respond quickly and loudly.

What we think might keep us from looking stupid, causes us to look stupid.

God used Balaam's donkey in a totally unpredictable way. No one expected the donkey to be the hero of the story. God is in control of all creation and He uses this story to show us how all things can be used for His glory.

DISCUSS:

1. Where do you see yourself in this story? Balak? Balaam? Balaam's donkey?
2. Are you more likely to notice something no one else sees or are you more likely to respond loudly and combatively when someone challenges you? Why?
3. Have you ever been wrongly accused of something? How did you respond? How did you talk to your accuser once you were vindicated?
4. Honestly, how does it make you feel that God used a donkey for His purposes in the story?

⁷ Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. ⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to him: ⁹ “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” ¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

¹² “As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

¹³ Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’”

¹⁵ She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the

woman and her family. ¹⁶For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Enough.

In your mind, as you hear it right now, is that a positive or a negative word?

Enough means as much or as many as required.

If the recipe says 6 eggs, then you have 6 eggs and only 6. It's enough. We struggle with having enough because we would desire to have some margin, also known as more than enough.

It seems that enough isn't usually enough for us.

So, then the question becomes how much would be enough? It's such a tough question to answer because the target is always moving. What is "enough" today may not feel like enough tomorrow.

Interestingly, the scarcity mindset is so pervasive in such an affluent area, but facts are facts. We may even struggle from a scarcity standpoint more than places faced with poverty. We can get paralyzed by the fear of losing what we have.

The Widow was told she would always have enough if she was generous with what she had. She

provided bread regularly for Elijah, then for her son and herself. The promise of God, given through Elijah, is propelled by her willing generosity. Generosity is the driving force of the blessing. Often in our scarcity, we forget to be generous.

Our God is generous.

This is just another example of God's economy being upside down. Because we have received from God generously, we should also be generous to those around us. Not expecting something in return, just choosing generosity because of the Love of God.

The challenge in the passage is how to be honest with ourselves about our generosity. Are we generous? What does generosity look like to you? Jesus makes it clear generosity is a heart condition, not a total of how much we have given. The widow's two mites were much more than the Pharisee's bag of gold. One gave everything they had, the other gave a little of their massive fortune. Who was generous?

In this story the exercise of faith the widow undertook is remarkable. Believing in God, she used what little she had to give away a piece of bread.

That's living out confidence in God that He will provide, not just saying you trust Him.

DISCUSS:

1. How would you define generosity? Describe a time when someone has been generous to you. Describe a time when you have been encouraged to be generous. How did you respond? Why?
2. How would you define enough? Describe a time when you believed you had enough. Why was that enough? Do you believe enough is within reach again? Why or why not?
3. Which is harder for you, believing you have enough or being generous? Why? What's something you can do to grow in the area that's harder for you?
4. Tell us about a time when you had to rely totally on God to provide.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from

Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Have you ever worked at a place where there was an obvious worst part of the job? Imagine working at a restaurant that is always busy. Every shift is understaffed because of a lack of help in a small town.

Imagine the restaurant has a microwave that is mostly used by the staff to heat leftovers on the fly.

The microwave needed to be cleaned once a week whether you liked it or not. Imagine how gross a hastily used microwave in a restaurant can get. Now imagine it's your job to clean it.

Not fun.

At least the job won't kill you.

As a follower of Jesus, Ananias was waiting to see how God might want to use Him. Waiting to be called into service. Waiting to hear the voice of the Lord call him into some awesome opportunity.

The job Ananias got called to do was to heal a killer.

This is the perfect picture of how radical the grace and mercy of God are. God is sending a trusted

follower of Jesus to heal and restore the man trying to single-handedly end the Way.

Understandably, Ananias was a bit apprehensive. But he said yes when it was really difficult to do so. He had plenty of reasons to say no, to back away, to pretend he didn't hear God, and to wait for another sign.

"Really, would God ask me to do something so reckless?" It would seem that yes, He would. And how would this make you feel?

It seems Ananias is a faithful servant of the Lord. He hasn't arrested or murdered any followers of Jesus. Isn't Ananias a good candidate for the "chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles...?" And if not, why not?

If this was asked of us today, we'd take to social media and complain about the ask. Mock Saul/Paul, pointing out how terrible a guy he has been. Talk about how unqualified he is for the job.

Ananias may have felt that way, but we don't find that out. He pushed back once, then said okay. He did the task God asked him to do. He was faithful. Odds are, he had been faithful in a number of small things before God asked him to do this. We don't know that for certain, but it's a safe guess.

Our nonresponse to the opportunities to be faithful in the small things often disqualifies us from the bigger things.

We talk about saying yes to what God asks before we know the question because God deserves our yes. But we can come up with lots of reasons to say no to difficult asks.

If we determine we will say “yes” ahead of time it’s much easier to honor our “yes” in the moment the hard thing is asked of us. It is harder to muster a yes when everything within us is saying no.

Ananias trusted Jesus in this moment. We miss out on the inner dialogue. But he had to be saying, “Jesus, I think this is a bad idea, not my will but your will be done. I’m probably going to die, but even if I do, you have saved me and I will live forever in your presence.”

DISCUSS:

1. Can you think of a modern equivalent of this story? What is it? Why?
2. Who are you more like in the story? Saul/Paul or Ananias? Why?
3. Talk about the importance of saying yes before you are faced with a difficult question or situation.

4. Do you think God would ever ask anyone to go into a situation where their life may be at risk? Why or why not?
5. Do you think Ananias was more afraid of human repercussions or disobeying God? Why?
6. What are you more afraid of, human repercussions or disobeying God? Why?

¹ While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, ²who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. ³So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them.

⁴The Lord said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the Lord's fierce anger may turn away from Israel."

⁵So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor."

⁶Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁷When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand ⁸and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman's stomach. Then the plague against the Israelites was

stopped; ⁹ but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

¹⁰ The Lord said to Moses, ¹¹ “Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. ¹² Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. ¹³ He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.”

Can you remember a news story where the person being interviewed is being lauded as a hero, and their response is, “I just did what anyone in my situation would have done”?

Have you ever thought, well maybe, but other people were there and they didn’t do what you did?

From the earliest records of plagues or disease epidemics, we can find stories of heroics. As early as the 2nd century we can find records of followers of Jesus stepping in to care for people who had been stricken with whatever disease was causing the plague.

Many, even early historians, believe that the Christian response of caring for the sick, trying to nurse them back to health without consideration for

their own health, decreased the mortality rate of the diseases.

While their pagan neighbors were discarding the sick into the streets without food, water, or any care; Christians were actively serving and caring for the sick. Even the simplest acts of care, bringing water and food and providing shelter impacted the survival rates of the inflicted.

Multiple times in the first few centuries, Christians responded this way and it made a huge difference that didn't go unnoticed. It showed a huge divide between followers of Jesus and pagans in how they cared for each other. Christians didn't fear death and they stayed in the mess throughout the tragic season. And because of that, the Church grew.

This story of Phinehas, who you have probably never heard of, is a classic example of one person jumping in to make a difference while countless others stood around doing nothing.

He decided to take a stand.

No one is advocating murder. What Phinehas did then fit the time and the situation but would be frowned upon nowadays, for good reason.

Phinehas was standing amid a camp where thousands were dying around him, in short order,

because of the sins they were perpetrating against God and His people.

God had been very clear with His people about His rules they were to live by. The laws were tough, but they had all agreed they were fair, and they would abide by them.

Then they didn't want to live by those rules anymore. They were enticed to live as they wanted, letting their desires drive their actions. And the result of that decision was catastrophic, not just for them but for their families.

Phinehas was willing to act boldly to hold people accountable to the laws to which they had committed. For the sake of God and His wishes, he was willing to risk being called out by those who were living by their own rules.

It would appear Phinehas wasn't concerned with his well-being but was focused on the righteousness of God at the moment he acted. There is no way to know how many lives Phinehas saved. The Lord relented because of his righteous act and the plague stopped.

And God made a covenant with Phinehas. Covenants with God are big deals. This one isn't well known, but it counts. God covenanted with Phinehas just like He did Noah and Abraham and

Israel and David. It just has less impact because its focus is just Phinehas' family, for all time. Still a big deal, just a smaller impact.

Phinehas did what was right at the right time, even though it didn't make everyone happy. That's not easy to do, but it matters when someone is willing to take that risk.

DISCUSS:

1. Does this story about Phinehas surprise you? How?
2. Where in the story do you see Phinehas have the opportunity to do something different from what the masses are doing?
3. How can someone get to a place where they are willing to risk doing the right thing without concern for their own well-being? Have you ever felt that way about something? When?
4. What covenants between God and man are you aware of? What do you know about each of them?

²²I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

The book of Romans in the Bible starts in chapter 1, verse 1 saying, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus...” Paul was the one who was writing this letter to the Church in Rome.

Then at the end of the book, chapter 16, there is a single line that says a guy named Tertius wrote down the letter. So, which is right?

Both. Yes, that’s possible.

Tertius means third in Latin, a common name for a slave at the time. He was a scribe or the fancy word amanuensis.

A professional writer took on many possible roles. Tertius may have just copied down exactly what Paul told him, word for word, longhand. This is unlikely as it would have been really difficult to keep up. But it is out there as a possibility.

Maybe he had a shorthand system that he used to take notes and Paul approved the letter once it was written out in long form.

Or maybe Paul gave Tertius the information he wanted to share and the main points he wanted to get across and Tertius put it all together. These were all the roles scribes could play.

It is possible that Tertius wrote down more than just this letter to the Church in Rome. We don't know, because this is the only time he is mentioned.

What is of note is that Tertius' remark remained in the letter throughout history.

That means that the early Church, the apostles, and the disciples of Jesus all accepted his role and his significance.

The followers of Jesus understand that the Bible is unique from other books because there is a lot that is not in the Bible.

"Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." John 21:25

Most books or collections don't admit they didn't get it all. They want us to believe they have captured it all and we don't need another resource. John just tells us there is tons of stuff that he didn't write down.

That means hundreds or thousands of people who interacted with Jesus and/or the disciples didn't make it into the book. That doesn't mean the interactions weren't significant, it just means they weren't recognized.

But recognition by default doesn't mean less significance.

The roles, the tasks, the conversations, and the learnings that aren't included in the Bible aren't less significant. They just haven't gotten the recognition. So, as people of God, we need to decide what is important to us. Are we looking for more recognition or being more significant?

Tertius was most likely a slave or had been. Paul discerned he was worthy to be recognized for his service to the Gospel regardless of the stature he had in society. You'll notice several women mentioned in Romans chapter 16 as well. Recognition for another group most people would have ignored.

Paul wanted to make certain we understand there is an equal seat at the banquet, the wedding banquet in the Kingdom of God, no matter the role we play here on earth.

DISCUSS:

1. Do you find yourself striving for significance or recognition? Why?
2. Imagine what the wedding banquet in the Kingdom of God will look like. Who is seated there that surprises you? Why?
3. Have you ever thought about the stories and people who aren't in the Bible? Do you ever think about what might have happened? Why or why not?

³⁵The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

³⁹“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

Andrew is the older brother of Simon who is renamed Peter by Jesus. As we read above, Andrew is responsible for bringing Peter to Jesus in the first place.

It's a really interesting scenario to have the older brother be less famous than the younger brother. It's not the only time it's happened in the Bible. It brings to mind Esau and Jacob.

Esau and Jacob were twins (Gen. 25:19-34), Esau was born first, with Jacob grasping onto Esau's heel as he came out of the womb.

Jacob wasn't a great guy and he manipulated Esau into giving up his birthright. In Israel, being the oldest son, was a huge deal when it came to inheritance and the father's blessing.

Jacob's line became the people of Israel, God's people. And you probably haven't heard of Esau or his descendants.

Now Peter wasn't manipulative and didn't trick Andrew out of his birthright.

But you've heard of Peter and you can think of some things he was a part of throughout the ministry of Jesus. You also can think of his role in the early church after Jesus ascended.

What do you know of Andrew? That he was a disciple. That he was Peter's brother. That's it.

If you read this passage carefully, you see that Andrew was one of John the Baptist's disciples. That was a tough gig. Jesus didn't stay in nice places, but at least Jesus would allow a decent meal once in a while.

Following John meant life in the desert, locusts and honey lunches, and enmity with the majority of Israel.

We know that Andrew had grit. We know he was loyal. We know he was willing to risk social standing and reputation for the sake of God.

He had already dealt with being absent from home and his oldest son's duties by spending time following John. The concept wouldn't have been foreign to his parents or his brother for that matter.

Andrew was also open to God moving and asking people to be involved in what He was doing.

A big takeaway from the leadership of John is all about humility.

29 "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now

complete.³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.” John 3:29-30

John the Baptist says of Jesus, He must become greater and I must become less. John led with the example of humbling one's self before the King. He did a great job of modeling this for his followers.

He did a great job of leading Andrew to be willing and able to do the same. To humble himself in the presence of Jesus and do whatever it takes to make Christ known. Even if that means deferring to his little brother.

There is so much we can learn from someone who doesn't have much real estate in the text of the Bible.

DISCUSS:

1. Have you ever experienced a seemingly unfair family situation? Whether regarding birth order or inheritance or whatnot? How did that impact your ability to love your sibling(s)?
2. When you think of John the Baptist, what's the first thing that comes to mind?
3. If you had been a disciple of John the Baptist, what do you think you would have learned from the experience?

4. What are the ways humility learned in following John could have paid off for Andrew while following Jesus?

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

It's pretty safe to say that you have heard of Joppa before. The most famous story about Joppa is referenced in Jonah. Jonah went down to Joppa to run away from God.

Joppa is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and it is just a few miles from the city of Lydda (mentioned in the passage).



It wouldn't have taken Peter that long to get to Joppa from where he was. But still, by the time he got there, Tabitha was dead, her body had already been washed, and the mourners were present.

Death was a part of life for the Jewish people. They were faced with death often. There weren't many medical practices at this point in history, so not much was known about medical healing. If there was going to be healing, God would have to do it.

This story is interesting for so many reasons. Tabitha is a woman. She is so valued by her community that they send men to find Peter in another town to bring him to Tabitha in hopes he might be able to heal her.

These men traveled 20 miles in a day to retrieve Peter. No small task in the early 1st century. The effort was put out to save a woman who served the people of God. They valued her and her work in for the church. She was too important to lose.

Would everyone at this place and time respond the same way? Hard to say. Women didn't have the same standing in normal society as men. However, within Christian circles, women were valued much more and their contributions to the Church were sought out.

This story highlighting the resurrection of Tabitha is a perfect example of how the different groups approached things. Tabitha's story is included while hundreds of other stories aren't. During this time, the non-Christian population may have ignored the story of a remarkable woman.

Peter's role in this miracle is interesting. The men go to get him and Peter just prays. Nothing spectacular like we see in some of the other resurrections in the Bible. Peter prays, then says, "Tabitha, get up." And she does.

The power of God wielded through His people is mighty. Anything is possible. Jesus told us that what we have "seen" done, we will do even greater things because the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is with us.

Peter was a willing vessel for the work of God through Him. He didn't need a bigger role than just being the vessel of healing. God did the healing, Peter got out of the way. There's probably a good lesson in there for us.

DISCUSS:

1. Can you think of the other resurrection stories in the Bible? There are 10 of them. HINT: Some are in the Old Testament.

2. What stands out to you in the life or story of Tabitha? Why?
3. When you read a resurrection story do you ever wonder why God didn't do that for someone you love(d)?
4. Would you expect Peter to have a bigger role in this healing than what he did? Why or why not?
5. How could you empty yourself so you can be a vessel for what God wants to do through you?

¹ Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?”

² To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ³ ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’

⁴ “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. ⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. ⁶ God spoke to him in this way: ‘For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. ⁷ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’ ⁸ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹“Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹“Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹²When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

¹⁷“As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. ¹⁸Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ ¹⁹He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰ “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. ²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. ²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

²³ “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶ The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷ “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us?’ ²⁸ Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰ “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹ When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ³² ‘I am the God of your

fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³ "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

³⁵ "This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

³⁷ "This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.' ³⁸ He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

³⁹ "But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of

Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!' ⁴¹That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. ⁴²But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

⁴³You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

⁴⁴“Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, ⁴⁶who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

⁴⁸“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

⁴⁹ “Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?
⁵⁰ Has not my hand made all these things?’

⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Have you ever been part of an organization where the leaders didn't want to hear the truth?

Maybe more than not wanting to hear the truth, they don't want to hear bad news. Have you been part of a meeting where a quarterly earnings loss was referred to as negative growth?

We can try to manage the narratives around us, but the truth still exists. And in the end, the truth comes to light, no matter how uncomfortable it is.

Stephen is a disciple of Jesus. He is famous for this passage. The stoning of Stephen. But why was he killed? What did he say that enraged the Sanhedrin so much?

He shared the truth. He told the story of the history of Israel, including how the leaders and teachers of

the law had murdered the prophets of Israel over the centuries, including Jesus. All true. And Stephen died because of it.

Stephen's death, in and of itself was tragic. It's sad when people die. And Stephen's death was one of the most important events of the New Testament. Before Stephen's death, the majority of the disciples of Jesus were still in and around Jerusalem. Feeling as safe and comfortable as possible given the circumstances.

Stephen's brazen, public speech put the Sanhedrin in a position where they had to do something about this new sect.

What used to feel safe and comfortable was anything but that now and the followers of Jesus scattered.

This scattering started the unprecedented expansion of the Gospel of Jesus around the world in a very short time.

As is often true in a life of following Jesus, what was meant for evil was used for good. God took a horrible tragedy and turned it into a catapult for the Gospel to the edges of the known world.

Jesus had talked about the Gospel being preached to every nation on the planet. Most of the people He

told this to had never left the boundaries of Israel in their lifetimes. They certainly weren't world travelers.

This story of Stephen solidifies the fact that Jesus defeated death. Death didn't stop Jesus and death started a revolution of the Gospel despite the Sanhedrin attempting to stop it.

DISCUSS:

1. Can you think of a time in your life when what was meant for evil was used for good?
2. How do you think the disciples would have been scattered outside of Jerusalem without the stoning of Stephen?
3. Can you think of a situation where leaders are uncomfortable with the truth to the point of acting recklessly?
4. Knowing that Jesus has defeated death for all who believe in Him, how do you feel about death?