



BEING JESUS CHRIST TO THE WORLD

Building Community, Changing Lives, Bringing Hope.

## ***“Leaving Home Ain’t Easy, But May be the Only Way”***

**Theme: 20/20 Vision-Leaning into a New Year with Hope**

**Sermon Scripture: Romans 12:2; Exodus 13:17-18**

**Family Activity for the Week:** Get a clear pitcher of water and enough clear glasses for everyone to have one. Read the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: 1-15. Talk about why we need water. What would life be like without water? Why do we need water? Jesus said we also need water for our souls. What do you think he meant by that? Now, pour everyone a glass of water and take a drink. What does it feel like as the water goes down into your body? Does it feel refreshing? Talk about how water not only give us life (our bodies are 80% water), but how it can be used to clean and make things new. God wants to give us life and make us new, so end your time giving thanks to God for water that quenches our thirst and fills our souls.

**Monday, January 6** - Read Mark 10:46-52. If there ever was someone that would have greeted people with words like, “I know just what you need,” it would have been Jesus. He also exhibited divine wisdom. Jesus realized that we must acknowledge our need so we can be open the healing power offered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus even asked this blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?”

▲ In a world without Braille, with no established support services, a blind man had no choice but to beg. When have you found yourself at your wits end, feeling helpless, out of options? Imagine Jesus standing before you asking, “What do you want me to do for you?” What will you tell Jesus you want him to do? What is your greatest need?

▲ Scholar Craig Keener notes that, “The disciples want to get on with the business of setting up the kingdom ... not understanding that stopping for a blind beggar is the sort of thing Jesus’ kingdom is all about.” In what ways can we get so busy pursuing our “successful” lives that we become more like the disciples than like Jesus?

***Prayer:*** Lord Jesus, you want me to share my deepest needs with you, even though you already know them. As I begin this New Year, give me courage to come before you honestly, with an open heart. Amen.

**Tuesday, January 7** - Read Lamentations 3:19-41. Lamentations is Hebrew poetry. It is a heart-broken reflection over the death and destruction that took place in Jerusalem when the Babylonian army overran the city in 586 B.C.E. Amidst the rubble, ashes and dead bodies, we hear two themes. (1) God’s covenant love and faithfulness, and (2) the need on our part for honest self-examination and returning to God.

▲ At times of suffering, our pain can turn us against God. We think that if there is a God, God must be cruel and callous. The writer honored his pain in verses 19-20 but clung to trust in God (verses 22- 24, 31-33). Is there any basis other than wishful thinking for trusting God when we’re in pain? What helps you to keep trusting God?

▲ Verse 26 said, “It’s good to wait in silence for the LORD’s deliverance.” It was a patient, listening silence. It led Jeremiah to verse 41’s call: “We must search and examine our ways; we must return to the LORD.” How can searching and examining our ways make our hearts ready for the paths to deliverance God wants to open for us?

***Prayer:*** God, help me to hold onto you when I’m in pain from my past. I give those hurts to you so I can move into the future with hope. Teach me to sit with you, returning to you, as you call me forward. Amen.

**Wednesday, January 8** - Read John 5:1-18. On Monday, we saw Jesus ask a blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:46-52) Jesus asked this man, who had been sick for 38 years, another seemingly obvious question: “Do you want to get well?” The man didn’t answer directly but described why what he wanted was impossible. Then Jesus told

him to do the impossible, “Get up and walk.” The man made the attempt, and God’s power flowed in and made him well.

▲ At Jacob’s Well, in John 4, Jesus said he came to offer all of us, “living water.” Many people at this pool saw the water itself as holy or magical. Why did this man need to grasp that God, not “magic water,” is the source of healing? For what reason might Jesus have told him to make the effort to rise, instead of just pulling him to his feet?

▲ Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath, which broke traditional rabbinic rules. Rather than honoring this healing, the religious leaders harassed Jesus. In what ways can we let church or family customs and policies get in the way of God’s healing power?

*Prayer: Lord, in those moments where I am not sure I want to get well, help me to get to my feet and walk towards you. I invite your power to flow through me, filling me with your living water. Amen.*

**Thursday, January 9** - Read Matthew 8:5-13. A Roman centurion commanded 100 soldiers. He understood and practiced authority. The centurion in this story wasn’t a Jew—he was part of a foreign military occupying force. He had obviously heard of Jesus’ healings and accepted him as an authority in this matter. Somehow, he sensed that Jesus had the power to go beyond all boundaries and heal all hurts.

▲ When we (or people we care about) are in danger, we should go at once to the most powerful authority available (a manager, a teacher, the police). The centurion did that. When you are struggling, to whom do you turn? God often works through people. What would it look like for you to trust Jesus as your supreme authority for healing and help, even when that help comes through doctors, counselors, pastors and the like?

▲ Jesus’ love crosses all borders and boundaries. He includes those that others exclude. He calls us, as his followers, to do the same. Who are some outsiders Jesus is calling you to love and draw into belonging? In what ways can you reach out to them?

*Prayer: Lord, help me to see you as the source of healing and trust in you to be with me always. Sometimes, I forget to come to you. Remind me every moment of your presence today. Give me awareness to see the needs of others around me and be the answer to their prayers. Amen.*

**Friday, January 10** - Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. In this reading, the apostle Paul talks about asking God for relief from, “a thorn in my body.” (No one knows for sure what the “thorn” was. Some have hypothesized that it might have been damaged eyesight—see Galatians 6:11.) Paul did not get the physical relief he asked for, but he received an even more precious kind of healing—the assurance that God’s grace was enough, and that when he was weak, then Christ’s power made him strong.

▲ Paul thought he knew what he needed. The answer didn’t match his request, yet he trusted God enough to accept it and live in peace with God’s gift. When have you faced the painful loss of something you really wanted? Has God’s grace been enough for you?

▲ Paul called his “thorn,” whatever it was, “a messenger from Satan,” a bad thing. Still, he said, he could see that it served a good purpose in his growth, “so that I wouldn’t be conceited,” and, “so that Christ’s power can rest on me.” In what ways have you seen God’s power bend even hurtful or evil things to serve a good purpose?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, may I trust in you when my prayers are not answered just the way I want them. Take even the painful moments from my life and help them mold me into the person you want me to be. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 11** - Read Matthew 8:14-17. Putting people or events “in a box” helps to simplify life for us. If we are honest, sometimes we do that with Jesus. We think he “only” brings spiritual salvation, or he “only” healed people with certain kinds of ills. In this short passage, Matthew showed that Jesus defied categorization. He delivered people from evil in a whole variety of ways. Jesus truly is the source of love that hits the spot, love that can meet our deepest needs whatever they are.

▲ Picture yourself on a hillside, with this scene unfolding just below you. You hear the voices; you see the change in people. Suddenly Matthew says, “Wow—I just realized. He’s relieving the inwardly tormented. He’s curing the bodily ill. He’s fulfilling Isaiah’s well-known text: ‘He took our illnesses. He carried our diseases.’” You walk down to meet Jesus. In what part of your life do you especially want his power to work? Do you want to follow him, to join in his work of building God’s healing, restorative kingdom? Why or why not?

***Prayer:*** Lord Jesus, bring healing to my body, heart, mind and soul. Help me to be free from moments that push me away from you, and embrace what brings me close to you. Amen.