**TAKE HOME BIBLE STUDY**



 **This study is designed for you to do at home each week during Lent 2021. Each Saturday Pastor Brand will post a video on St. Paul’s website (resources for Lent) where he will go over the questions and dig a little deeper into the Scriptures.**

**INTRODUCTION**

“Return to the Lord your God,” we sing before the Gospel reading to mark the season of Lent. This particular Lenten season, we will focus on God’s historic call to His people to repent and the things that might get in the way of us returning to God. Even if our desire is to return to God, there are many stumbling blocks, not the least of which is ourselves. That is the subject of our Lenten theme this year as we dive into God’s Holy Word and consider carefully the distinct difficulty experienced by the people we encounter in each biblical narrative.

We will also explore in each study how that particular difficulty might be keeping us from returning to God or, equally important, how God may be using that very difficulty to draw us to Him. Whatever the case may be, it is always God’s desire to be our God and for us to be His people (Jeremiah 31:33).

In many ways, this is a very timely study. The whole world experienced a time of plague and social distancing last year during Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and beyond. That holy season was unlike anything we had ever experienced. It was a time when God, during the season of Lent, was clearly calling to us and saying once again, “Return to the Lord your God.” Throughout the Scriptures, God has time and time again called His people Israel back to Him.

It will be interesting, and perhaps also challenging, for us to look at these themes in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak and see ourselves in the place of the biblical people we will be studying. How do we handle things when we didn’t really understand what was going on? Has the event itself, and the challenges and complications it presented in our lives, caused us to draw further away from God or to “return to the Lord our God”?

We will explore and try to answer these questions and many others through these sessions: A Call to Return; Prayer; Betrayal; False Witness; Denial; The Kingdom of God; and The Resurrection and You: Come and See. As we do, we remember in faith to “return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13).

**Study 1- February 14 to 20 The Week of Ash Wednesday**

**“A Call to Return”**

**Read: Joel 1:1–20; 2:11–17**

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, You desire to draw Your people back to You through repentance. Help us to acknowledge our sinfulness in thought, word, and deed; what we have done and what we have left undone. In faith, let us see the love that You have for us all in the sending of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Savior from sin. Lead us by Your Spirit to desire to know and do Your will, to walk in Your ways that You may be glorified. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

 A plague of locusts. No, this is not Egypt during the time of Moses, though it may very well bring those days to mind in God’s people. God spoke to His people through the prophet Joel to bring the people to repentance and return to their loving heavenly Father. Go back and reread Joel 1:2–5.

God spoke to His people in a way that would remind them of the character of the God they love and serve. He spoke to them as the One who wanted to be their God and they His covenant people. The almighty and merciful Lord says to them (and to us): “Return to the Lord your God. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13).

**QUESTIONS**

1. What was going on in Joel’s time that led God to speak to His people through this prophet?

In addition, how then does God speak to this situation?

How does that compare with the way we express repentance now?

What is the “day of the Lord,” and how is it described (1:11)?

2. In the present, what is the Lord asking the people to do?

Do these words have any application in our lives today?

3. In Joel 2:14, the prophet seems ambiguous but hopeful that God may relent of the destruction. Is God a God of destruction? Is God a God of blessing?

Would it be wise for us to consider that He could be both? How do you feel about that fact?

What kind of blessing is Joel expecting?

4. How were the people asked to prepare for worship? (See Joel 2:15–17)

How do you prepare for worship?

**CONCLUSION**

 Like the locust plague that the people in Joel’s time experienced, COVID-19 continues to affect us and threatens our lives during a second year of Lent. This virus sent a scare into the world, which threatened our lives and our livelihoods. Did we make connections to this passage (2:13)? Were you able to hear God calling you to return to Him? Did you heed that call?

In the end, God showed His mercy to His people by sending grain, wine, and olive oil. God promised, “You will be satisfied” (2:19). God also assured His people that He would no longer make them a reproach among the other nations.

Prayer: Almighty God, lead us to repentance of all our sins of thought, word, and deed; what we have done and what we have left undone. You have blessed us by the sending of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us always to hear You calling us back to return to You in faith toward You, love toward one another, and obedience to Your holy will for our new lives in Christ Jesus. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

**Study 2- February 21 to 27**

**“Return to Prayer”**

**Read: Matthew 26:36–44**

 **Speak our theme verse: “**Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, You have taught Your disciples and us how to pray in faith. Help us in all times and in any circumstances to turn to our Father in prayer as You have always done. Grant that we submit to the Father’s will in what we think, say, and do, that all glory may be given to our triune God alone. In Your name we pray. Amen.

 Communication . . . the lifeblood of all relationships. The Lord God has always desired a relationship with those whom He has created. He has blessed us with different ways of communicating with one another. And He has given us the blessing of being able to communicate with Him, man to God, child to Father, along with the certainty that He is listening. In this study, we will look specifically at the importance of prayer, using Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as our point of reference; we will also look at the relationship that He has with the Father.

**QUESTIONS**

**1.** What was the point of taking Peter, James, and John farther into the garden with Him?

What was Jesus sorrowful and troubled about, specifically?

2. First, what is God’s ultimate will for all people as His creation?

Second, what is God’s will for Jesus Christ, His only Son?

3. What does Jesus say to the three men?

How are we to understand the word watch in this context?

Is this related to any instructions that Jesus has given for us to follow?

4. The prayer is the same. Three times the Son addresses the Father, asking God to take the cup (of suffering/of sin/of death) away from Him. Three times He prays, “Not My will, but Yours be done.”

What are we to learn from how and what Jesus prays?

**CONCLUSION**

 The events of the Gethsemane narrative are full of unexpected human physical manifestations—the drops of bloody sweat, the disciples falling asleep repeatedly, and Jesus being sorrowful to the point of death. We are seeing a fully human Jesus showing the weakness of humanity but remaining without sin. We also witness Him showing a strength that we do not have in and of ourselves, but in Him we have the same Spirit that cries, “Abba, Father.” And in the end, we truly learn from Jesus Christ to pray.

**CATECHSIM REVIEW The Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer**

***Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***

*What does this mean?* The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also. *How is God’s will done?* God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.

Pray: The Lord’s Prayer

**Study 3- February 28 to March 6**

**“Return from Betrayal”**

**Read:** Matthew 26:14–25, 44–56

**Speak our theme verse:** “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)

Prayer: Gracious Lord, as part of Your suffering, You knew that one of Your own, Judas Iscariot, would betray You into the hands of sinners, bringing the hour of Your suffering and our salvation to fulfillment of the Father’s will. You have shown us the Father’s love in that while we were still sinners, You died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Create in us clean hearts and renew a right spirit within us. Draw us ever closer to You that we may dwell in Your presence the remainder of our days and unto eternal life with You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

 Judas . . . the name has become synonymous with betrayal. Jesus, who had chosen Judas as one of the twelve disciples, referred to Judas as “a devil” (John 6:70–71). In His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus called Judas “the son of perdition” (John 17:12 KJV). Though Judas, when he saw that Jesus was condemned to die, felt remorse, it still had been said of him by Jesus, “The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24).

**QUESTIONS**

 **1.** What is betrayal?

Why is it such a damaging sin?

2. In what way did Judas’s betrayal come about?

How did Judas plan his handing over of Jesus?

Imagine you are a reporter. How would you answer the usual questions: the who, what, when, where, why, and how of Judas’s betrayal of Jesus?

3. The night that Jesus was betrayed was not the only time the Mount of Olives (or Olivet) was mentioned during Jesus’ life and ministry.

What events took place on the Mount of Olives besides Jesus’ betrayal by Judas?

4. Why did Jesus come forward toward Judas and the officers bearing lanterns and torches and weapons (John 18:3–6)?

Why did Jesus ask the question, “Whom do you seek?”

What is the reaction and posture of the officers when Jesus says, “I am He”?

**CONCLUSION**

 Much is made in the four Gospel accounts about Judas. More is written of him by Luke in Acts 1. Betrayal is one of the more sinister acts that a human being can perpetrate because it involves intentionally breaking the trust of someone close to gain something. The account of Jesus being betrayed by Judas is evocative of Joseph being betrayed by his brothers in Genesis 37 and, after everything, how Joseph responds to them. The words “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20) have a Christological component, which looks forward to Judas’s evil deed of greed and Jesus dying to win salvation for all.

Pray: Heavenly Father, hear my ardent plea…..

Alas! And did my Savior bleed, and did my sov’reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I had done He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide and shut his glories in
When God, the mighty maker, died for His own creatures’ sin.

Thus might I hide my blushing face while His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness, and melt mine eyes to tears.

But drops of grief can ne’er repay the debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away: ’Tis all that I can do. Amen!

**Study 4- March 7 to March 13**

**“Return from False Witness”**

**Read:** Matthew 26:57-68

**Speak our theme verse:** “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)

Prayer: Precious Savior, as You endured that mockery of a trial, with slander and conjecture and false accusations being thrown at You as You were struck and spat upon, You have shown us how to turn the other cheek. Help us learn to do the same when others revile us and say all kinds of false things about us, that our own words and actions may not be in vengeance toward others but may show others the love that You have for all of us through patience and forgiveness and mercy. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

 Blasphemy . . . just one of the things the chief priests and teachers of the law were trying to catch Jesus doing that they may put Him to death. Blasphemy is words or actions that show disrespect for God. Sometimes people can become so blinded with hatred, as did the religious leaders in Jerusalem toward Jesus, that it is effortless to break the Eighth Commandment. Then as they attempt to justify their words and actions, they often magnify the blasphemy, resulting in serious damage or complete ruin of another’s reputation. This is part of the scene of Jesus’ “trial” before Caiaphas, the high priest, and other temple leaders.

**QUESTIONS**

**1.** What charges are the chief priests seeking to levy against Jesus (Matthew 26:59)?

2. Of the false witnesses whose words are recorded in Scripture, two gave testimony against Jesus. What did they say? (Matthew 26:61)

3. The high priest stood and asked Jesus for a response. How does Jesus fulfill what was written about Him? (Read the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:7)

4. This connects well to the question that Jesus had asked His disciples earlier and the confession that Peter had given. What was that answer? (Read Matthew 16:16)

5. How does Jesus answer the high priest’s question?

What is ironic about Caiaphas’s inquiry?

**CONCLUSION**

 It is jarring to us that the sinless Son of God is being tried for crimes He did not commit. What great lengths people will go to when they want to wrongfully convict someone in the court of public opinion! Jesus’ life and ministry were without sin, but He is falsely accused of the sin of blasphemy, and a sentence of death is called for by the people.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, it is with great sorrow that we look upon Your sham of a trial and hear the false witnessing against You who were without sin. Help us when we are haunted by false testimony against us, and remind us what You endured for our sake. Give to us strength, courage, and faith when our enemies say all kinds of false things against us on account of You, knowing that we are blessed by You, who truly are the Christ, the Son of the living God. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, may we confess this always, but with faith and love, firmly believing and holding on to this saving faith in You, even unto death. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Study 5- March 14 to March 20**

**“Return from Denial”**

**Read:** Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

**Speak our theme verse:** “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)

Prayer: Merciful Lord, on the night when You were betrayed in the Upper Room, You foretold that all the disciples would leave You, in fulfillment of Scripture. When Peter assured You that he would follow You to prison and even death, You met his words with the astonishing truth that he would instead deny You three times that very night. Fill us with steadfast faith and courageous confession in the midst of all the dangers and troubles that threaten the faith of our hearts and the confession of our mouths that You will confess us to Your Father in heaven on the Last Day. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

 The wording of our text (Luke 22:54–62) shows us how passive Jesus is now, allowing Himself to be arrested and led away. The frightened Peter follows just far enough behind so as to not be noticed and risk being captured also. He loves the Lord Jesus but perhaps a little less than he loves himself. In these verses, we are reminded of the meaning of the First Commandment: “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Peter’s boastful words in the Upper Room (Luke 22:31–34) were a bit hasty as now he begins fearing something more than God, loving something more than Jesus, and trusting something other than God’s promises and Jesus’ teachings.

**QUESTIONS**

1. In Luke 22:31–32, why does Jesus repeat Peter’s (Simon’s) name?

What does Satan want with Peter?

What does Jesus mean by “strengthen your brothers”?

2. In what way was Peter “following” Jesus in verse 54?

3. Who was the first one to recognize Peter?

What did this person say about him?

4. How did Peter respond the second time he was recognized?

5. The third time came about an hour later—perhaps time enough for Peter to cool down, unless, of course, he was pondering the first two unwelcome accusations during that hour. What did the third person insistently say?

What was Peter’s response this time?

Since time is important in this pericope, what happens next?

**CONCLUSION**

 Things happen very quickly now. While Jesus is questioned by Caiaphas, Peter is questioned in the courtyard by those who recognize him by the light of the fire. Jesus’ words to Peter earlier that night in the Upper Room are being fulfilled. Peter had said he was ready to go to prison and even death with Jesus. But fear can get the best of even loyal men. The one who was so boastful before now shouts in anger at those accusing him of knowing Jesus. With the third denial of his Lord, Peter hears the cock crow. One disappointed look from Jesus jogs Peter’s memory, and he comes undone—running away in tears of shame.

Pray: Heavenly Father, hear my ardent plea…..

Jesus, refuge of the weary, blest Redeemer, whom we love,
Fountain in life’s desert dreary, Savior from the world above:
Often have Your eyes, offended, gazed upon the sinner’s fall;
Yet upon the cross extended, You have borne the pain of all.

Jesus, may our hearts be burning with more fervent love for You;
May our eyes be ever turning to behold Your cross anew
Till in glory, parted never from the blessèd Savior’s side,
Graven in our hearts forever, dwell the cross, the Crucified. Amen!

**Study 6- March 21 to March 27**

**“Return to the Kingdom of God”**

**Read:** John 18:12–14, 28–38

**Speak our theme verse:** “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)

 Read Psalm 24, paying special attention to verses 7–10. The Israelites in the time of Samuel rejected the Lord as their King and sought an earthly king to rule over them like the other nations had. God obliged and gave them earthly kings, for they had long rejected God, His will for His people, and His ways. But this would not thwart God’s plan for our salvation. As we sing in the season of Advent: *“*The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here. Life and salvation He doth bring*”* (*LSB* 341:1). This King would be like no other king God’s people had ever known or that the world would ever know after Him. Zechariah prophesied about Jesus: “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). Before this was fulfilled, John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Christ, would preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2).

**QUESTIONS**

1. The Jews brought Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to Pilate’s house. Why did they not enter Pilate’s house with Jesus? (John 18:28)

2. Pilate demands to know the accusation the Jews were bringing against Jesus. What is their answer to Pilate? (John 18:29-30)

Do they give a specific charge?

3. What was the real reason given for bringing Jesus to Pilate?

What did this fulfill?

4. Pilate faced a big dilemma with this situation. His options were limited. His actions seem only to be stalling the inevitable. He returns to speak some more to Jesus. (John 18:33)

What does Pilate ask Jesus this time?

What insight does this give us about Pilate’s grasp of the situation?

5. What is the two-part response that Jesus gives Pilate instead of a straight answer? (John 18:34–35)

Why does Jesus give His answer to Pilate in this way?

What is Pilate’s response to Jesus’ question?

6. Still stuck in worldly-mindedness, Pilate has his “aha” moment and asks Jesus, “So, You are a king?” (John 18:37). Jesus answers by saying that for this purpose He came into the world. What is the purpose for which Jesus came?

**CONCLUSION**

 Jesus states that He has come to “bear witness to the truth,” and that those who are “of the truth” listen to Him. (See also John 10:25–28.) Having grown weary of listening to Jesus talk in such a mysterious way, Pilate dismisses Jesus’ silly notions—as he sees them—with the words “What is truth?” (John 18:38). The world still dismisses Jesus with this very question. Read John 1:9–13. The Words of Jesus are not just truth, they are eternal and divine Words!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as the world continues to reject You and dismiss the truth of Your Word, help us, we pray, in the midst of that rejection, to hear the truth with ears and hearts of faith that cling to You as our King of kings. Bless us with perseverance and strength as we face the days ahead until You come again in glory. In Your name we pray. Amen.

**Study 7- March 28 to April 3**

**“Return and See”**

**Read:** Matthew 28:1-10

**Speak our theme verse:** “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)

Prayer: Father in heaven, You called Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, out of death and the grave and raised Him back to life, thus showing that His sacrifice for the sins of the world was acceptable to You. As we gather together to celebrate with joy His glorious resurrection, lead us always to know that we live by faith and not by sight. Help us always to believe in the promises that the empty tomb assures us of, namely the resurrection of our own bodies and life everlasting with You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen. Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! And I too will rise!

 When they woke that first Easter morning, little did anybody know that everything had changed for those who would believe in Jesus. However, Jesus had been saying this to His disciples for some time. “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Matthew 16:2; emphasis added).

It can be very difficult while experiencing grief and loss to remember those things God’s Word tells us that can bring us peace and hope in the midst of sorrow. Yet, as those who are called to believe in Jesus, we are called to believe not only that Jesus suffered and died on a cross but also that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection brings that peace and hope to all who believe. On this day, we celebrate the Lord’s resurrection. Each and every day is Easter to us because we have been called to faith in Him who was raised. As Jesus told His disciples, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). For this reason, you are invited this morning, with the same invitation given to the women at the tomb by God’s messenger—the angel sitting on top of the stone—to “come and see.”

**QUESTIONS**

1. “Seeing is believing,” or so the saying goes. Is this true?

2. What were the women who came to the tomb that morning going there to do?

What did they expect to see? (see also, Mark 16:1–2; Luke 24:1)

In detail, give a description of what they actually saw.

3. Why do you think the guards “trembled and became like dead men”?

What was the women’s response?

What was the disciples’ response to the women?

**CONCLUSION**

 When they awoke that Easter morning, the women did not expect to see the things that they encountered. They probably expected to go to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ lifeless body and to wipe away many tears of sorrow and loss. Instead, they experienced a myriad of emotions when they stumbled upon an angel from heaven, a rolled-away stone, two catatonic guards, and no body in the tomb. Such words of comfort and joy the angel said to the women that morning: “He is not here, He is risen, just as He said.” And still today, over two thousand years later, we echo that Good News, that Gospel refrain, “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

In a sense, every day for us now is Easter. He lives, and because He lives, we shall live also. Come and see what the Lord has in store for you. Come and see what the Lord has prepared for you. And one day come and see Him as He is for we shall be like Him.

Prayer: Loving Father, by the glorious resurrection of Your Son, Jesus, from death and the grave, You have indeed opened to us everlasting life. Allow us, by the ways You have chosen, to “come and see” our risen Lord Jesus through the means of Word and Sacrament, until that day when He returns and we shall see Him as He is in all His glory, and we shall be like Him. In the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Sing:** I know that my Redeemer lives; What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
 He lives, He lives, who once was dead; He lives, my ever-living head.