

True Worshippers

[Jesus said,] Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her (Mark 14:9, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 14:1-9

Song: “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”

As a first-time visitor, I was surprised to see buckets strategically placed around the church sanctuary to catch the rain that was coming through several openings in the ceiling. However, I was greeted warmly, and someone explained to me that the landlord had been patching the roof, but to no avail. I took a seat and waited for the worship service to begin.

In today’s passage Jesus gave honor to a woman who didn’t seem significant. To onlookers, she certainly didn’t look like a candidate for a permanent memorial among the faithful. But what we may deem unlikely, the Lord may see as precious and praiseworthy.

How glad I am that I didn’t let the dripping ceiling deter me that day. The praise team led the small congregation in heartfelt worship, and when it was time for the sermon, everyone present was attentive, including me. Despite raindrops plopping into buckets, these worshippers focused on Jesus and offered sacrifices of sincere praise and worship to Him.

Father, help me always to see with a heart that is attuned to Your perspective so that I’ll never miss the fellowship of those who truly love and worship You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 25–31. **Apollo Stevens** is a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She works as a hospice professional, serves in ministry, and enjoys pets.

God Our Defender

The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace
(Exodus 14:14, *KJV*).

Scripture: Exodus 14:10-20

Song: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

The notice came out of the blue. A complaint had been filed against me, and the allegations were numerous—enough to cost me my job if substantiated. When I read the list of grievances, I was shocked! What was written wasn't even remotely accurate. Regardless, I was under investigation. As I reread the complaint, anxiety started to take over. I began to pray. And as I called on God, many biblical accounts of Him intervening on behalf of His people flooded my mind.

In today's Scripture, Moses instructed God's people to hold their peace when the Egyptian army was closing in on them. I knew this was the best thing for me to do in my situation as well, believing that God would work things out. After several weeks of fact-finding, it became clear that the allegations were unfounded. In addition to being absolved, a meeting was arranged, allowing the grievant and me to reconcile and move forward.

Whenever we feel threatened or attacked, either by people or through circumstances, pausing to pray helps to stem the tide of emotions that rises up from within our alarm, hurt, fear, or anger. We can recall that God is always present, ready to comfort and able to intervene on behalf of those who trust Him.

Father, when I'm faced with the hurtful actions of others, help me to remember to pray. You have the power to comfort me and to work everything out. In Jesus' name, amen.

God's Aquarium

The children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left (Exodus 14:22, *KJV*).

Scripture: Exodus 14:21-31

Song: "Hear My Cry, O Lord"

I have visited a few magnificent aquariums. Floor-to-ceiling transparent walls allowed me to see the array of marine creatures as I walked between the exhibits. As impressive as each exotic variety of species was, I couldn't help but to keep thinking about of the huge amount of water that was being held back so I could safely pass through.

Oppressive bondage caused the children of Israel to cry out to God in anguish, and God heard their cries for help (Exodus 3:7). As part of Israel's deliverance, God miraculously made a dry, safe path through the Red Sea for the people to escape. The Red Sea today is 220.6 miles across at its widest and has an average depth of 1,608 feet. Its name may come from the red algae that periodically float near the surface, and it is home to more than 1,200 species of fish. Imagine walking to freedom between *those* walls of water!

God will also respond to us when we cry out to Him for help. Hebrews 4:16 tells us, "Let us . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (*KJV*). When we are in need, the mercy of God is only a prayer away.

Father, thank You for Your mercy and grace. When I am in need, I will cry out to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Breaking Bread Together

As they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body (Mark 14:22, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 14:17-26

Song: “We Gather Together”

The positive impact of families regularly eating a meal together has been documented in several research studies. The results show that children who participate in family meals may have better self-esteem, better vocabularies, and better grades. Children may also experience lower rates of substance abuse, be less likely to develop depression, and be more likely to have healthier eating habits. The secret behind the power of the family meal is the conversation that happens when families gather around the table.

Jesus had a very important conversation with His disciples when He shared a meal with them. He used that opportunity to prepare the disciples for what was about to happen to Him on the cross.

When families gather to “break bread,” spending some of that time focusing conversation on God and His Word has the potential to strengthen each person’s faith. Adults can use mealtimes to share timeless truths found in God’s Word and then discuss how to apply those truths to daily life. Children can interact by asking questions, sharing their thoughts, and bringing their own ideas for life application. The truths of the Bible offer courage, comfort, direction, and so much more! Mealtimes have the potential to nourish not only the body but also the mind and spirit.

Father, thank You for opportunities to gather around the table with those I love. I will look for opportunities to talk about Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Darkest Hour

When the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour (Mark 15:33, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 15:25-39

Song: “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

For three weeks I slept curled up in a ball on the sofa. I had lost 17 pounds in spite of family and friends dropping off food for me to eat. My husband had died, and the grief was more painful than I ever could have imagined. We had been married only a little over six years. One year into our marriage, I was coming home and turned onto our street. I saw flashing red lights and wondered which of our neighbors was in trouble. As I drew closer, I saw that the emergency vehicle was in *our* driveway. My husband had experienced a heart attack. The next five-and-a-half years, he fought to get better. Then his kidneys failed.

Today’s passage recalls Jesus’ darkest hour. When we feel lost, abandoned, alone, and defeated, He knows our pain. I thank God for all the prayers and support I received during my darkest hour. I experienced first-hand the comfort that comes from being lifted up by the prayers of others. As the days passed, the grief became more bearable. Eventually I was able to move forward.

Psalm 46:1 reminds us that God is “a very present help in trouble” (*KJV*), and He often uses His people to shine His light into our dark days. Their faith can hold us up when we are in the throes of grief.

Father, help me to see when others are hurting so that I can comfort and pray for them. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Blind, She Showed the Way

In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them (Psalm 22:4).

Scripture: Psalm 22:1-11, 28-31

Song: “Fairest Lord Jesus”

I was taken to live with my grandmother at the age of two. What was remarkable about this is that my grandmother was legally blind; she was only able to see shadows. Two aunts were also present, but both had jobs. So my grandmother was solely responsible for me the majority of the time. What stands out in my memory is my grandmother’s determination that I should receive a good education and also that I would learn about Jesus. Unable to walk the two miles to church herself, my grandmother made certain someone took me to Sunday school and worship services. By the time I was 10, I was reading the Bible on my own and was a very happy member of the bell choir.

Today’s passage speaks of ancestors—previous generations—whose faith is remembered. I am who I am today because of my grandmother’s godly influence. Growing up, as I continued to read and absorb God’s Word, I came to understand who Jesus is, and I received Him into my life as Savior and Lord. I now serve in ministry and help others grow in their understanding of the Bible.

Although my grandmother could not see with her physical eyes, she showed me the way to a better life through education and, more importantly, through God’s gift of salvation.

Father, help me to show others the way to You. I want to be an example of Jesus through the life I live. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Heavy Lifting

They said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great (Mark 16:3-4, KJV).

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

Song: “How Great Thou Art”

As a healthcare professional in a leadership role, I’m often in meetings where we discuss projects involving multiple people and departments. It’s common in these discussions for someone to describe a challenging aspect of a project as “heavy lifting.” Merriam-Webster defines *heavy lifting* as “a burdensome or laborious duty.” I can attest from personal experience that when “heavy lifting” is required to complete a project, it is indeed challenging and sometimes very difficult. Occasionally, however, an individual or team will volunteer to complete the most difficult tasks, and I breathe a sigh of relief: the really hard work will be done for me.

Jesus volunteered to do the ultimate heavy lifting for each of us condemned sinners. Jesus knew that the weight of sin—like the stone covering Jesus’ tomb—was far too heavy for us to move on our own. But when He chose to pay our debt on the cross, He lifted sin’s crushing burden and took it out of the way.

When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, we receive the gift of new life in Him through the wonderful miracle of salvation. Our sins are forgiven, and we step into a life where we can live free from the weight of sin.

Father, thank You that through the cross, the weight of condemnation has been lifted from my life forever. In Jesus’ name, amen.