



LENTEN  
DEVOTIONAL  
2024

*WEEK FIVE*

NORTH POINT CHURCH  
1779 NE HOSTMARK ST  
POULSBO, WA 98370  
[WWW.NORTHPOINTPOULSBO.ORG](http://WWW.NORTHPOINTPOULSBO.ORG)



## A LENTEN JOURNEY WITH JESUS BY PASTOR ROB WILSON

### Introduction

We know the practice of Lent was well established by the 4th century. The word Lent is germanic in origin and means ‘lengthening’ as in days, so often interpreted Springtime.

Let’s assume, as some do, that the genesis of Lent came from early followers of Jesus preparing for 46 days to be baptized on Easter. And let’s assume that this practice was so meaningful that they took up the practice every year thereafter, not only to be refreshed again in their baptismal waters, but to actually mature, grow, and deepen their spiritual life with Jesus and other Jesus followers.

Such assumptions leave us with both an invitation and a challenge as we walk onto the path called Lent. The invitation comes from Jesus who says, “come follow me” to Jerusalem, to the cross, and finally to the world altering reality of an empty tomb. The challenge is to take the ancient practice of Lent and allow it to meet you in our contemporary world, in this season of your life, in the raw reality of what it means to follow the resurrected Jesus on a daily basis.

If I were a person preparing to be baptized into Christ, devote my very being to Him, and put my life on the line by living as He asks me to live, I would want to study that way of life closely. I would want to do more than read it but digest it and perhaps maybe even try it on like a shirt that looks good on the rack although your’e just not sure it will fit. I would want to ask questions of it and let it ask questions of me. So this 46 day journey will utilize Jesus’ longest recorded speech, called the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ to guide us, grow us, and prepare us. In reality, this devotional is only for those who do want exactly those things.

So, let’s assume that our forefathers and foremothers were right and that we won’t be the same person we are today come Easter because Jesus is about to meet us and the Holy Spirit change us. Welcome to A Lenten Journey with Jesus via the Sermon on the Mount.

### 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 10

*Matthew 6:19-21*

*19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

I remember watching two television shows with my father-in-law which we both loved: American Pickers and The Antique Road Show.

“American Pickers” is all about people who epitomized Jesus’ words for us today. These are people who had stored up, and stored up, and stored up...many times to a dysfunctional level. The TV show hosts visit the owners of these ‘earthly treasures’ and negotiate to buy certain things from them. Moth and Rust were going to win the day on most of these items in their barns, garages, and homes. Thieves could easily break in and steal but more likely they would have too much to pick from.

Jesus’ words make all of us with so many ‘material possessions’ in our American context just a little bit nervous because we realize we too store up, store up, and store up. We may not ever be on ‘American Pickers’ but many of us have a lot of ‘earthly treasures’.

The question becomes what exactly are the ‘treasures in heaven’ that Jesus is talking about? He doesn’t define these treasures for us. At first this famous passage seems clear cut. But we are left to ponder, probably intentionally, what a ‘treasure in heaven’ actually is: our relationship with God, absolutely; our acts of service to the downtrodden and needy; certainly; the using of our gifts in the Body of Christ for the building of the Kingdom; yes.

But I’ve discovered that defining a ‘treasure in heaven’ necessitates Gary’s second tv show: Antique Road Show. We need an expert to bring a ‘treasure’ to who can assess it, speak of its value, and ultimately put a price on it. And that is precisely what Holy Scripture does for us. As we read its inspired texts, we discover what God values, what God calls us to value, and what The Antique Road Show might look like when we get to heaven.

**How is this text challenging you to reassess what you call valuable?**

**What treasures are you storing up in heaven?**

**Monday, March 11**

*Matthew 6:22-23*

*22 “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So, if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”*

These verses are to be read as a continuation of yesterday’s teaching that distinguishes ‘earthly treasures’ from ‘treasures in heaven’. We can take our ‘Antique Road Show’ metaphor one step further as Jesus speaks about the relationship between the heart (the seat of our desires) and our eyes (our perceptions). The ‘Experts’ on the ‘Antique Road Show’ can use their eyes to take in an object’s essence, they look for certain traits or marks like a detective, they have trained their eyes to look for certain things in order to determine value.

Jesus is encouraging us to be aware of the connection between our heart and our eyes and to ensure that our eyes are in tune with all that is good and beautiful in the Kingdom of God economy. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Philippians: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Jesus is inviting us to view the world through his Kingdom values so that we may attach our hearts to His Kingdom as it breaks into our world. Jesus was once leaving the Temple in Jerusalem with his disciples. Their eyes were overwhelmed by the earthly beauty of the Temple. What they saw elicited heart felt devotion. And then Jesus moves into the classroom and tells them that the earthly treasure that was the Temple would come tumbling down.

Jesus seeks to move into the classroom of our lives and teach us the same lesson about our eyes-heart connection. Jesus is daily seeking to make us ‘Antique Road Show’ assessors that know what to look for as His Kingdom breaks in.

**What is Jesus drawing your ‘eyes’ to and asking you to attach Kingdom value?**

**What is Jesus, like with the disciples leaving the Temple, drawing our ‘eyes’ away from because they only have earthly value?**

## Tuesday, March 12

*Matthew 7:1-5*

*1 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

I once preached a sermon series called ‘the humor of Jesus’. It is noteworthy that nowhere in the gospels is Jesus said to be laughing. Some have taken this to mean he never did, and further did not have a sense of humor. One such person met me in the line going out of the sanctuary and said in a disgusted tone: ‘well, I hope your next sermon series is on the WRATH of God’! I laughed...internally of course.

Jesus’ illustration in these verses demonstrates his ability to use metaphor as humor. The picture of a man with a ‘log’ in their eye who believes they can help someone else with a speck is both ludicrous and ready made for an old-time comedy skit.

But humor aside, Jesus is concerned about the wrath we can bring onto others when we judge. Judging of others, in other words, is no laughing matter but carries serious consequences.

‘Do not Judge’ is a well-worn statement but it must be said, often taken out of context. Jesus is not saying that a person should not judge at all in the sense of discernment (which takes judgement). But he is drawing attention to our proclivity to judge others caustically, unjustly, and too often with malice, even though we may lead with the phrase, ‘bless their heart’.

Jesus’ teaching here is clear and concise and aims to teach on hypocrisy: before we judge outwards, look inward. Before we condemn another and denigrate their reputation, we are asked to confess our own faults and acknowledge our own need to repair ourselves. In my example, it is important for me to examine my own need for Jesus to possess a sense of humor as much as it is to be aware of my parishioners need to have a God of justice. Perhaps she is right, and I am wrong. Perhaps she had done unto her a horrible sin or an experience of great darkness which God’s wrath is needed to handle. Or more than likely, we are both right and no judgement is needed for the other person. God is God. God is complex and sovereign. God can be a ‘God of Joy’ and ‘God of Justice’ at the same time. In fact, don’t these verses show us precisely that.

**On this Lenten Journey, where is God calling out our ‘judgmental’ spirit and actions?**

**What ‘logs’ can we name that necessitate divine surgery?**

**What ‘specks’ in other’s eyes annoy me and cause me to judge in ways Jesus warns me against?**

## Wednesday, March 13

*Matthew 7:6*

*6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”*

At first glance, I am of the same mind as one biblical scholar who wrote: “Verse 6 seems cryptic and unconnected to the immediate context...”[1]. But perhaps this is Jesus’ way of teaching the difference between judgement and discernment. Jesus is likely putting some qualifications on his comments given above to ‘not judge’.

For the Jewish people, something that was called ‘holy’ was of divine origin or set apart by God with that special mark of God’s holiness. Imagine a skilled artist paints a great work just for you. You love this special work not only because of its beauty but because of the artist and their love for you in painting it. When it comes time to write your Last Will and Testament, you must choose where the painting goes. Whom do you choose and why? How will you pass it on to them? We will of course choose a person or destination for the painting who will not only care for it but also know of its special origin and honor that. You would choose someone who would be discerning in whom they chose to pass it onto one day as well. Finally, you would likely choose to tell them of this great gift in a special way, well before you passed away and definitely not through the ‘Reading of Your Will’ in an attorney’s office.

So too with the Gospel. If that is what Jesus means by ‘holy’, and I think that is a good assumption, then it means we are discerning with the Gospel message. The Gospel is the treasure we hold within us as jars of clay. And in sharing it and our lives with others, we must discern well to whom this treasure is given. Perhaps Jesus also means we should be discerning in ‘how’ we share this holy and wholly Good News.

And for all of you ‘dog’ lovers and ‘pig’ lovers out there, do not be offended by Jesus’ use of them in the negative. His words are softened when we read them from the eyes of a first century Jewish world! Stay focused on the beautiful piece of art the Creator of the Universe has painted just for you.

**How is the Gospel message a treasure in your life? Can you articulate this in telling your faith story?**

**What does it mean for you to be discerning in how and to whom you share this ‘holy’ piece of art with others.**

[1] Craig Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 128.

## Thursday, March 14

*Matthew 7:7-11*

7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 “Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

Whenever we speak of prayer and how to interpret Jesus’ words here, it becomes abundantly clear how broken we are as humans and just how right John Calvin was when he spoke of our ‘Total Depravity’. I say this not to insult us, but because whenever I’ve studied this passage in a group, the first question that arises is both transactional and self-centered: “does this mean I can ask God to be wealthy, and I will get it?... because it has not worked so far”!; or “if I have faith and ask for my healing or healing for a loved one, God must do it, right”?

First and foremost, notice how Jesus speaks of prayer first in the context of relationship rather than transaction. He uses the image of a loving and perfect parent. Prayer is always to be grounded in the deep bonds of healthy and whole relationship with a loving and generous God who knows our best. If we put the transactional request before the role of relationship, our prayer life will be distorted beyond scriptural recognition.

Secondly, it is important to apply the ‘whole of scripture’ to any one topic. For example, Jesus has just given us the “Lord’s Prayer” a few verses before this. When we put the two teachings together, we discover that again, Jesus roots all prayer in relationship (“Our Father, who art in heaven, Holy be your name...”) and adds the caveat of God’s will being done “on earth as it is in heaven”.

So, am I not able to pray for ‘blessings’, or ‘healings’, or anything else that is upon my heart? Absolutely you can. But do so in the context of relationship with the knowledge that our “Father in Heaven” will respond as a perfect parent knowing what is our best, not our wants.

I read somewhere years ago that God answers all prayer but God’s responses are: SOMETIMES ‘YES’, SOMETIMES ‘NO’, SOMETIMES ‘GO’, AND SOMETIMES ‘SLOW’. The ‘Go’ response is when God asks us to do something to help the prayer come to fulfillment. The ‘Slow’ response is when God answers prayer over a period of time and in a way we may never foresee.

**What in this passage endorses or challenges your prayer life?**

**How can you practice prayer in a ‘Relational’ context and guard against a ‘Transactional’ mindset?**

**Friday, March 15**

*Matthew 7:12*

*12 "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."*

These verses are an oldie but goodie...a golden goodie in fact! A little corny I know, but 'a golden goodie' captures well this verse which has come to be known as "The Golden Rule" which has served for centuries as a 'good' foundation for Christian ethics. There are three things I'd invite you to reflect on with the "Golden Rule":

1. Sometimes great power and wisdom gets packaged in short, pithy statements rather than long diatribes. Less is more. Take for example  $E=MC^2$ . And take for example the Golden Rule. Predisposing, as Jesus does, that a person is healthy and whole emotionally, spiritually, and relationally, this maxim covers so much ethical terrain with so few words. It is easy to remember, basic albeit challenging to apply to real life situations, and common to all ages, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. And yet its deep wisdom has served societies well through the centuries. **How can this 'Golden Rule' speak into your life and serve you well right now?**

2. The Golden Rule as it has been called can be found in other religious traditions but many times in the negative: "Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you." This has thus been called the "Silver Rule" and rightly so because we appreciate how Jesus makes this ancient wisdom pro-active and thus people and action oriented. As biblical scholar Leon Mounce wrote: "In its negative form, the Golden Rule could be satisfied by doing nothing. The positive form moves us to action on behalf of others."

**What is the difference for you between the "Silver Rule" and the "Golden Rule" and how does that matter in the situation you reflected on in the above question?**

3. This is the second time that Jesus refers to the "Law and the Prophets" in the Sermon on the Mount. The first time came near the beginning (5:17) and this time at the end of a major section. In fact, going forward we will not learn any new commandments from Jesus but for encouragement and motivation to be obedient. So, the "Law and Prophets" bracket the major teaching section of Jesus' longest recorded speech which cannot be an accident. Holy Scripture bracketing Jesus' speech. Holy Scripture bracketing our lives. **How can you bracket your day with Holy Scripture this Lenten season?**

**Saturday, March 16**

*Matthew 7:13-14*

*13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

I love the fact that most of Jesus’ metaphors, imagery, and parables are timeless in nature. Take the ‘gate’ for example. A gate is a gate in any culture, in any time in history. Its function is to let people come and go...to keep people in and out from a fenced area it is attached to. But just because Jesus’ imagery is accessible does not make it easy to comprehend. In fact, the ‘narrow gate’ and the ‘wide gate’ is one such example.

**At face value and before reading any further, how do you understand these verses?**

Given the fact that Jesus does not explain the image of the gate further, some have read them through a lens of ‘salvation’: some will be saved, and many will not. Others have read Jesus’ words through the lens of the Pharisees who were constantly listening in and sometimes speaking up. One scholar writes: “The narrow gate and road referred to Jesus’ teaching, which emphasized not external requirements but internal transformation.”<sup>[1]</sup> The wider gate was in contrast the Pharisees external requirements which the gospel makes clear that no one can follow perfectly. And this leads us to a third and related interpretation which is to see Jesus’ words through the lens of discipleship. To follow Jesus is not easy. It is as C.S. Lewis said, not an ‘easy’ religion in how many define ‘easy’. Lewis goes on to say: “I didn’t go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don’t recommend Christianity.”

**So given several options to interpret Jesus’ words, and perhaps a few others you’ve heard, how do Jesus’ words make sense to you and speak into your life right now?**

[1] Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 34