

## What Was Jesus Most Passionate About?

On Sunday we continued our quest to experience Jesus at a deeper level by considering what he was most passionate about.

1. Warm-up Question: Scientists have reason to believe that our four dimensions of reality – time, plus the three dimensions of space – are not uniform throughout the cosmos. Scientists postulate that some galaxies may have as many as 12 dimensions of reality. Try to imagine a galaxy that has no dimension of time or a fourth dimension of space. Describe what that might be like?
2. It's important to remember that Jesus came to us from a different dimension – the heavenly dimension – where reality clearly radically differs from here on earth. Jesus' greatest passion was to bring heaven's alternate reality to earth. He talked about it constantly, referring to this alternate reality as “the Kingdom of God” or its equivalent, “the Kingdom of Heaven.”
  - a. The prayer Jesus taught us to pray begins with these words, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:10. What does that prayer mean? Put it in your own words.
  - b. The first words out of Jesus' mouth when he began his public ministry were, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.” Matthew 4:17. What does “repent” mean? What does it mean to say the Kingdom of Heaven “has come near?”
  - c. In Matthew 13:44, Jesus said, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” What's the point Jesus is trying to make here?
3. According to Jesus, life is like a treasure hunt. There's something worth finding that's so beautiful we should gladly give up everything to find it.
  - a. Author Brian Rea tells the story of the mysterious wedding gift his mother-in-law gave him and his wife. They had to travel all the way to a remote island in Sweden to find out what it was. When in your life have you experience a great hunt? What happened? How did it feel as you searched? How did it feel when you found it?
  - b. In your own spiritual life, have you ever felt like you are on a quest to find something really important? How would you describe that feeling?
  - c. Jesus says the “hidden treasure” we're seeking is the Kingdom of God. A “kingdom” is a place where a king rules. So a “Kingdom of God” is any place where God rules. Jeff said, “My heart can be a Kingdom of God, my home, my workplace, any given situation, or a whole society, or even potentially someday

maybe the whole world.” Tell us about a place, time, or situation where you have experienced the Kingdom of God?

4. All that we’ve discussed so far raises the question, “What does ‘kingdom space’ look like? What does it feel like? And how does it differ from our present reality?” Jesus goes a long way toward answering that question in a famous parable. Read Matthew 20:1-16.
  - a. In Jesus’ culture, unemployed people would gather in the town square at the crack of dawn. Employers would come by and choose whom to hire for the day. Whom do you suppose got picked first?
  - b. Harken back to your school days when teams were being chosen at recess or in gym class. How did that feel?
  - c. The ancient workday was sunup to sundown, approximately 12 hours from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. Imagine you were a differently-abled worker who was finally chosen at 5:00 pm. At the end of this parable, how would you feel?
  - d. Imagine you were among the first chosen at dawn and worked a full 12 hours. At the end of this parable, how would you feel?
  - e. According to this parable, what is the central organizing principle of the Kingdom of God? And how does that differ from the central organizing principle of typical human culture?
  - f. Jeff referred to the central organizing principle of the Kingdom of God as grace? Tell us about a time you gave – or received – grace. How did it feel?
  - g. We often associate grace with cutting people slack – and grace does frequently express itself that way. But ultimately grace means doing what’s truly best for someone else out of a heart of love for them. Sometimes that means accountability. Read the text of the letter Abraham Lincoln once sent to his step-brother, found on p. 3, then answer the question found there.
5. So far we have been mostly focused on our quest to find grace. But Jesus also made clear that grace is on its own quest to find us. Read Matthew 13:45-46.
  - a. Who does the merchant represent? Who does the pearl of great price represent?
  - b. Do you feel like a pearl of great price? Can you imagine God feeling that way about you? Why or why not?
  - c. Read the excerpts on p. 3 from Francis Thompson’s poem “Hound of Heaven.” This was the poem that haunted Dorothy Day until she became a Christian and famous social activist. Read the poem then answer the question found there.

## Abraham Lincoln's Letter to his Step-Brother

Dear Johnston:

Your request for eighty dollars I do not think it best to comply with now. At the various times when I have helped you a little you have said to me, "We can get along very well now." But in a very short time I find you in the same difficulty again. Now, this can only happen by some defect in your conduct. What that defect is, I think I know. You are not *lazy*, and still you are an *idler*. I doubt whether, since I saw you, you have done a good whole day's work in any one day.... This habit of uselessly wasting time is the whole difficulty; it is vastly important to you, and still more so to your children, that you should break the habit....

You are now in need of some money; and what I propose is, that you shall go to work, "tooth and nail," for somebody who will give you money for it ... and, to secure you a fair reward for your labor, I now promise you, that for every dollar you will, between this and the first of May, get for your own labor ... I will then give you one other dollar.... Now, if you will do this, you will be soon out of debt, and, what is better, you will have a habit that will keep you from getting in debt again. But, if I should now clear you out of debt, next year you would be just as deep in as ever.

Affectionately your brother,  
A. Lincoln

*Questions: What insights about authentic grace can we draw from this letter? What's the difference between holding someone accountable in a spirit of grace versus holding them accountable in a spirit of anger or offense?*

## Excerpts from "Hound of Heaven" by Francis Thompson

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him. . . .

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat—and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet . . . —  
"Rise, clasp My hand, and come! . . .  
I am [the One] whom thou seekest!"

*Question: What thoughts or feelings do these words evoke in you?*