



# THE SERVANT KING

2026 NAB LENT  
DEVOTIONALS



Weeks 6-7



## THE SERVANT KING: WEEKS 6–7

Whether it was Paul who wrote it or he was simply transcribing a hymn or poem he'd heard from others, Philippians 2:5–11 is one of the oldest pieces of poetry written specifically for the Christian Church. It speaks of Jesus's divinity, but rather than simply framing it through the lens of his kingship over all creation, it paints a picture of the Son of God as a humble servant – a servant king.

This poem isn't just important for our Christology – how we understand the person, nature, and role of Jesus – it's important for how we live our day-to-day lives. After all, Paul reminds us that this servanthood of Jesus is the exact same attitude we should have in our interactions with others and how we engage with the world around us, shaping what kinds of people we are to be.

Over the seven weeks of Lent, February 18 through April 4, join the entire North American Baptist Conference as we look at these seven verses, reflecting on and praying over each in turn as we prepare our hearts for Good Friday and the celebration of Easter Sunday.



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# WEEK 6

March 22

### Sabbath: Romans 8:6–11

As we mark the weekly sabbath rest during this Lenten season, take time to meditate on today's passage, reflecting on how it relates to Philippians 2:5–11. Read it over a few times, being mindful of where the Holy Spirit invites you to pause to consider what he wants to speak into your life today.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.  
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,  
he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5–11 NLT)

So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)

And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. (Romans 8:6–11 NLT)

March 23

## Authority

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth [. . .]  
(Philippians 2:10)**

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

“Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

“No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.” (John 8:1–11 NLT)

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, the teachers of the law pushed back against Jesus and attempted to trap him. Yet each time, Jesus was able to walk away unscathed. He did not do this through pounding the table to affirm his rightness or by arguing his position with such clarity that he won the debate. Instead, Jesus’s typical response was a third way.



When he is asked if the people should pay taxes to their oppressors in Rome – where a “yes” would likely anger his Jewish followers and a “no” would put him in the crosshairs of the Roman Empire – Jesus points to the coins themselves for the answer (Mark 12:13–17).

When he’s asked for a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority, rather than refusing them or giving into their demands, he tells them they can’t even read the signs already present in the world around them (Matthew 16:1–4).

One of the most powerful examples of Jesus sidestepping the traps of the religious elite is when they bring to him a woman caught in adultery. If Jesus had agreed with them and proclaimed that her sinful act should result in her stoning, he would fall prey to the wrath of Rome for circumventing their justice system, but he equally couldn’t take a stance that disagreed with or ignored the Law of Moses.

The crux of these interactions is the religious elites questioning the authority of Jesus. They want to know where his teachings come from, why he is able to make the claims he does, and where the power to back up those claims originates.

Throughout all these tests and traps, not only does Jesus always find a way to reject the false dichotomy given to him, but there is also another constant: the end result. The Pharisees and Sadducees always walk away still firm in their position, refusing to acknowledge Jesus’s full authority.

This is not a position unique to them. Most of us probably know someone similar who refuses to acknowledge Christ’s supremacy and authority. Some of us are probably in that same boat on occasion. Ultimately, though, every knee will bow, across all creation, acknowledging Jesus as Lord and recognizing his authority.

In the meantime, it is not up to us to convince those who refuse to recognize the truth; if Jesus himself couldn’t win over more than one or two of the religious leaders, we would be foolish to rely on our own persuasive words. All we can do is love people in everything we say and do and trust the Holy Spirit to help them shift their understanding.

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*

March 24

## Jesus Knew

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth [. . .]  
(Philippians 2:10)**

Later Jesus said to them again, “I am going away. You will search for me but will die in your sin. You cannot come where I am going.”

The people asked, “Is he planning to commit suicide? What does he mean, ‘You cannot come where I am going?’”

Jesus continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You belong to this world; I do not. That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am who I claim to be, you will die in your sins.”

“Who are you?” they demanded.

Jesus replied, “The one I have always claimed to be. I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but I won’t. For I say only what I have heard from the one who sent me, and he is completely truthful.” But they still didn’t understand that he was talking about his Father.

So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I am he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me. And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do what pleases him.” Then many who heard him say these things believed in him. (John 8:21–30 NLT)

Jesus knew about his death.

This passage takes place in all likelihood at least a year prior to his crucifixion in John 19, and Jesus is already telling his followers he will be lifted up on a cross. As normalized as it is in our modern Christian subculture to talk about dying to self and being crucified in Christ, it was

not at all normal during the first century to talk about death by crucifixion. This was a death of criminals.

Jesus knew he was holy.

He talks about being separated from the rest of us for a unique purpose given by God. After telling them again and again to follow him, he tells his followers they cannot come where he is going. His journey must diverge from theirs, for his purpose is higher.

Jesus knew his audience.

He tells them they are a sinful people. He also says their sins will be with them until their deaths, that no sacrifices at the Temple – no fasting, tithing, prayer, or other religious deeds – could clean the stain of sin from their hands and hearts.

Jesus knew he is the answer.

He says their death in their sins can only be avoided through belief in him. Paul describes it this way: “There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death” (Romans 8:1–2).

Jesus knew everyone, in the end, would understand who he truly is.

There were those who heard Jesus speak and teach who would come to believe in him. But there were also those who would refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Son of Man who came to save and redeem the world, until the very end of days. Ultimately, though, every knee bows at the throne of grace upon which Jesus reigns.

Jesus knew all this, and more.

How much do we know? If we are being honest with ourselves and others, we have significant gaps in our knowledge about even the things we consider ourselves to be experts on. We would be wise to recognize our deficiency and acknowledge Christ’s supremacy in all things.

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*

March 25

## The Shadow Proves the Sunshine

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth [. . .]  
(Philippians 2:10)**

O LORD my God, you have performed many wonders for us.

Your plans for us are too numerous to list.

You have no equal.

If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds,

I would never come to the end of them.

You take no delight in sacrifices or offerings.

Now that you have made me listen, I finally understand—  
you don't require burnt offerings or sin offerings.

Then I said, "Look, I have come.

As is written about me in the Scriptures:

I take joy in doing your will, my God,

for your instructions are written on my heart."

I have told all your people about your justice.

I have not been afraid to speak out,  
as you, O LORD, well know.

I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart;

I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power.

I have told everyone in the great assembly

of your unfailing love and faithfulness. (Psalm 40:5–10 NLT)

There is a theological proof that states that in the same way shadows are the evidence the sun exists, it is the darkness in life that proves there is a Light in our world. In essence, the shadow proves the sunshine – the pain, suffering, and injustice we see all around us is proof



there is another way of living, a different kind of life that is true and good and wonderful, and there is a good God as the source of that Light.

Another way of saying this is found in Romans 2:15, “Their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.” Written on the hearts of every man and woman are the truths of God’s instructions.

Not everyone agrees with this assessment, namely those who do not acknowledge God as the sovereign of the universe and lord over their lives. But the truth remains – all of us know there is a difference between right and wrong, justice and injustice, healthy and unhealthy habits.

Whether we acknowledge him or not, Jesus is on the throne, and all existence will ultimately bow to his authority. For those of us who have already bent our knees in worship to the King over all kings, it is our duty to be like David, who writes, “I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart; I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power” (Psalm 40:10a).

But we must not keep the beauty of the good news only on our lips; the good news must also be shared through our hands, our ears, our bodies, through every act and action we take. David notes in this psalm that God does not delight in burnt sacrifices, but instead he is seeking a sacrifice of the heart, that we will “take joy in doing your will, my God.”

Micah 6:6–8 proclaims a similar understanding of what the Lord requires of us, but the minor prophet elaborates a bit, noting that God does not simply want us to walk humbly in his will but to do justice and to love mercy. When we seek to right the wrongs of a broken world in the name of Christ, we are proclaiming the Good News by making ourselves into living sacrifices, acting as servants of the Light who shine into the dark places of our world.

Look for ways today to be a servant of the Light of the world, shining his light in the darkness and thereby proclaiming the Gospel to those who need it.

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*

March 26

## What's Worth Bowing the Knee?

By Nathan Solak

**[. . .] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth [. . .]  
(Philippians 2:10)**

Search for the LORD and for his strength;  
continually seek him.  
Remember the wonders he has performed,  
his miracles, and the rulings he has given,  
you children of his servant Abraham,  
you descendants of Jacob, his chosen ones.

He is the LORD our God.  
His justice is seen throughout the land.  
He always stands by his covenant—  
the commitment he made to a thousand generations.  
This is the covenant he made with Abraham  
and the oath he swore to Isaac.  
He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,  
and to the people of Israel as a never-ending covenant:  
“I will give you the land of Canaan  
as your special possession.” (Psalm 105:4–11 NLT)

“But why?” That was the question I asked my director one day after one of our shows. I wanted to know why we bow. At the end of every single concert, show, and performance I have been a part of, I had always been told it was time to bow. No one ever explained why; it was just something we always did. As a theatre and choir kid, I had performed more bows than I think I can count. My director very kindly explained that it was what we did as a response to the applause from a show. They were showering us with praise, and our bows were to recognize and show respect to the audience for watching our show. Trust me, there were some shows they needed that recognition for sitting through to the end.

As I thought about the idea that one day every knee would bow to Jesus, it made me think the same question: But why? I think too often we read this passage and think this is a forced bow that comes out of submission to Jesus being the King. While that could be one reading, I think there is a richer one that makes us ask why anyone would bow their knees in the first place. What is it about Jesus that causes the knee to bow and praise, honor, and glory to be rendered?

Psalm 105 reminds us of some of those reasons why our knees might bow before Jesus the King. The wonders, the miracles, the rulings he has given are listed as things the psalmist asks God's people to remember.

As we sit in this season of Lent every year, it ought to make us pause and remember the biggest miracle and wonder – that God sent his only Son into the world to save us. He fulfilled his promise from thousands of years earlier that someone would ultimately come to fix what was broken.

God remembers his promises. There is not a single promise God has made that he will not finish. Let that sink in for a second.

Every. Single. Promise.

That is the kind of king we worship. That is the kind of kingly action that doesn't require people to bow; bowing becomes the only appropriate response. Bowing the knee to Jesus isn't just about our submission to his Kingship but also a response that his Kingship; his wonders and works are greater than anything else we could ever worship.

Our world offers a lot of things we could bow the knee to. In fact, there are probably some things we've bowed the knee to even this week – even today. What is truly worthy of bending our knee?

*Nathan Solak is the lead pastor at Ridgewood Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin.*

March 27

## Burning in Our Bones

By Shan Reed

**[. . .] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth [. . .]  
(Philippians 2:10)**

O LORD, you misled me,  
and I allowed myself to be misled.  
You are stronger than I am,  
and you overpowered me.  
Now I am mocked every day;  
everyone laughs at me.  
When I speak, the words burst out.  
“Violence and destruction!” I shout.  
So these messages from the LORD  
have made me a household joke.  
But if I say I’ll never mention the LORD  
or speak in his name,  
his word burns in my heart like a fire.  
It’s like a fire in my bones!  
I am worn out trying to hold it in!  
I can’t do it!  
I have heard the many rumors about me.  
They call me “The Man Who Lives in Terror.”  
They threaten, “If you say anything, we will report it.”  
Even my old friends are watching me,  
waiting for a fatal slip.  
“He will trap himself,” they say,  
“and then we will get our revenge on him.”



But the LORD stands beside me like a great warrior.  
Before him my persecutors will stumble.  
They cannot defeat me.  
They will fail and be thoroughly humiliated.  
Their dishonor will never be forgotten.  
O LORD of Heaven's Armies,  
you test those who are righteous,  
and you examine the deepest thoughts and secrets.  
Let me see your vengeance against them,  
for I have committed my cause to you.  
Sing to the LORD!  
Praise the LORD!  
For though I was poor and needy,  
he rescued me from my oppressors. (Jeremiah 20:7–13 NLT)

Has God ever told you to do something you absolutely did not want to do? Yet you knew if you did not do it, you would feel the burning in your bones?

When I was in high school, God called me to be a missionary in Japan. I was ecstatic. I could not wait to get there. I always told people I was planning to stay in Japan until I retired, throwing in the line “unless God tells me to do something else” to sound more willing to do what God said.

I did not think God would ever call me to leave Japan before retirement. Was I surprised in 2023 when he did just that! I spent several months telling God why this was not a good idea. However, I knew this was the right thing for me, the right timing. Once I accepted God's words, peace flooded my soul. At first, the burning in my bones was me trying to do my own thing. Then the burning in my bones became following after God's heart.

In today's passage, Jeremiah lays before God his struggles with God's calling. He is mad at God for giving him hard words to say to Judah and for making it impossible for him not to do what God has called him to do.

Jeremiah is tired of being the laughingstock of Judah, even among his friends. He doesn't want to say the hard words God has given him to say. He feels like God is using his strength to make Jeremiah do and say things he doesn't want to do or say.

He also recognizes that he cannot *not* say the words God has given him. If he does not say the hard things God has given him to say, “his word burns in my heart like a fire. It’s like a fire in my bones” (v. 9)!

Jeremiah recognizes God calls us to do and say hard things and, in that, God stands beside him, beside us, like a great warrior (v. 11). He recognizes God is the one who brings judgement and vengeance, so he says the word God gives him and then he waits for God to act.

In the last verse of today’s passage, Jeremiah praises God. He recognizes God’s redemption and rescue and praises him for it.

Jeremiah teaches us it is okay to express our true feelings to God. He also reminds us God is going to call us to do hard things we may not want to do. In the obedience, in bowing at the name of Jesus, we will experience God’s redemption and be led to praise the Lord for his rescue.

*Lord, may we be faithful in speaking and acting when you lead us. May we recognize the difference between the burning in our bones that is our own desire and the burning in our bones that is your word bubbling up to be spoken boldly. Thank you for your faithful presence, redemption, and rescue. Amen.*

*Shan Reed is the NAB Director of Mobilization.*

March 28

## Plan over Plot

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth [. . .]  
(Philippians 2:10)**

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. “What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.”

Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about! You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.”

He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.

So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus’ death. (John 11:45–53 NLT)

Just prior to today’s passage is the story of Jesus calling out Lazarus from his grave four days after he had been entombed. Jesus had turned back the clock on death before, but this was likely the most poignant instance. It was the first time he defeated death not simply because he was moved by the sorrow of the parents but to serve as a sign of his sent-ness: “Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me’” (John 11:41–42).



As a result of this awe-inspiring display of divine power, more and more people were choosing to believe in Jesus.

The Pharisees could not let this stand. This is the point in the ministry of Jesus where they transition from being a thorn in his side, probing and prodding him to determine if his teachings passed their theological standards, to being outright antagonists, actively looking for ways to bring about his downfall.

They plot his death.

Ultimately, this plot fit perfectly inside the plan God had for Jesus that would result in the redemption of all creation. However, it means that instead of the Pharisees partnering with God where he was at work in the world, they were actively striving to work against him, even if they didn't know it. That their efforts fit perfectly into God's plan simply illustrates his power and their limited nature.

All plots based upon human planning will ultimately be sublimated to God's plan. Choosing our way over God's isn't winning; instead, it often just cuts us off from the opportunity of being part of God's plan, joining with him at work in the world around us.

Are you actively seeking God's plan and how you can join in, or are you too focused on your own plotting? Are you bowing your knee to Jesus today?

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*

# WEEK 7

March 29

### Palm Sunday: Matthew 21:1–11

As we mark the weekly sabbath rest during this Lenten season, take time to meditate on today's passage, reflecting on how it relates to Philippians 2:5–11. Read it over a few times, being mindful of where the Holy Spirit invites you to pause to consider what he wants to speak into your life today.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.  
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,  
he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5–11 NLT)

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."

This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,



“Tell the people of Jerusalem,  
‘Look, your King is coming to you.  
He is humble, riding on a donkey—  
riding on a donkey’s colt.’”

The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.

Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

“Praise God for the Son of David!  
Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!  
Praise God in highest heaven!”

The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. “Who is this?” they asked.

And the crowds replied, “It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”  
(Matthew 21:1–11 NLT)



March 30

## Proclaiming the Gospel

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:11)**

Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus’ feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, “That perfume was worth a year’s wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.” Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples’ money, he often stole some for himself.

Jesus replied, “Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

When all the people heard of Jesus’ arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus. (John 12:1–11 NLT)

“Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.”

This quote, often attributed to Francis of Assisi, has a few problems. The first is that there is no record of Francis ever saying or writing this, or anything similar. The closest he comes is in his rules for how the Franciscans should preach, where he writes that the words being proclaimed should be matched by the actions of the one saying them.



The second problem with this quote is not the source but the content. Duane Litfin, former president of Wheaton College, summarizes it best: “It’s simply impossible to preach the Gospel without words,” he writes, “[P]reaching the Gospel is inherently verbal behavior.”

At its core – and by the very definition of the word – the Gospel is “Good News.” It is the proclamation that the Kingdom of Heaven is readily accessible to every man, woman, and child through Jesus Christ. As Scot McKnight describes in his book *The King Jesus Gospel*, the Gospel “is declaring the Story of Israel as resolved in the Story of Jesus.” It is the culmination of the history of the world in the person of Jesus. He goes on to write, “If you want to read the [Good News] gospel, hear the [Good News] gospel, or preach the [Good News] gospel, read, listen to, and preach the Gospels [of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John].”

That is, to share the Good News with someone is to share with them the life, ministry, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth.

Of course, to go back to Francis of Assisi, the Gospel is more than just words, but it’s nothing without words. We can talk about Jesus and his teachings and works all hours of the day, but if we don’t put those same teachings into practice and do our best to emulate the kinds of actions he took while he was here on Earth, our Good News is hollow. “Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works” (James 2:26).

The Gospel, then, is proclaimed, but it must also be lived.

When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with perfume, she was living out the Gospel. We can infer from other passages that Mary and her siblings, Martha and Lazarus, were actively sharing what Jesus had done for them and shared with them: they invited Jesus and his disciples into their home to allow themselves and others to soak up his teachings, and the news of Lazarus’s resurrection at Jesus’s command is not news you keep to yourself. But in addition to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus to any who would listen, Mary took it upon herself to live it out, in this case through worshiping her Savior and (perhaps unknowingly) preparing him for burial.

As we continue into Holy Week, how are you proclaiming the Gospel? And how are you living out that same Good News in your interactions with others?

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*

March 31

## Beautiful Folly

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:11)**

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise  
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.”

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense.

But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God’s weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he

freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD.” (1 Corinthians 1:18–31 NLT)

The construction on the Eiffel Tower was completed in 1889 and served as the centerpiece of the World’s Fair that took place in Paris, France, that same year. Yet even though it has become one of the quintessential Parisian landmarks alongside the Louvre, Notre Dame, the Arc de Triomphe, and even the River Seine itself, not everyone was a fan of the tower prior to its completion.

In fact, a year before the final rivet was put in place, a collection of artists and authors published an open letter titled “Protest against the Tower of Monsieur Eiffel.” They referred to it as “this useless and monstrous Eiffel Tower” that would “dominat[e] Paris like a gigantic black smokestack.” It wasn’t until the tower was actually completed and they saw the finished work – and the overall public sentiment in favor of the tower – that many of them changed their minds. However, not everyone was won over in the end; author Guy de Maupassant supposedly ate lunch at the Eiffel Tower’s restaurant each day because it was the only place in the city he couldn’t see the tower he hated so much.

Sometimes what one person sees as folly, another knows to be beautiful and wonderful, and often times it takes a bit of hindsight vision to transition from the former view to the latter.

For those of us who follow Jesus Christ and proclaim the beauty of the cross and the empty tomb to any within earshot, we are likely to be seen as fools. The way of Jesus is the way of abundant life found through death, of overcoming evil through grace and love rather than sword and violence, of strength found in weakness. It is the story of the upside-down Kingdom of God, where “many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then” (Matthew 19:30).

As we commit to proclaiming the Gospel through every word and action, we must also accept we will often be thought of as fools and failures. Our response to any such claims should never be to push back against them but instead to boast all the more in the Lord. May we learn to allow the beauty of the cross to shine through in the end.

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*

April 1

Witness

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:11)**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. (Hebrews 12:1–3 NLT)

In a court of law, there are chiefly two ways to make your case: evidence and witnesses. It is the evidence that conveys the raw information, such as a video recording showing a car passing through a specific intersection at a specific time, but it is the witnesses that often help interpret that evidence, or at least connect it to the larger story being told.

Not all witnesses are the same. Sometimes they are expert witnesses helping the judge and jury to understand the important technical bits of information provided by the evidence, such as the nuances of what a traffic camera can and cannot capture. Other times they are lay witnesses, present in the court to tell what they saw or heard pertaining the case, regardless of their specific area of expertise.

Often a case hinges on the testimony of the witnesses. What did they see? What do they know? Can they convey it accurately? And, ultimately, are they trustworthy as a source of information?

This is what it looks like in a court of law, but all of us ask ourselves those same questions about the people around us in our everyday interactions. For our closest friends and loved ones, some of these questions – “are they trustworthy?” – were answered long ago, but we are



still eager to learn what they know and hear about what they saw. Similarly, everyone around us is asking themselves these questions of us as well.

In Hebrews 11, we read of individuals and groups crucial to the story of God loving us and at work to redeem all creation. These witnesses to the life of faith are just a small snapshot of individuals who are part of the larger story; there are many more who are not mentioned, and even more who have come and gone since. We, too, are part of their legacy. We are also witnesses to the life of faith, if only we allow ourselves to be.

What kind of witness are you, particularly regarding the truth of the Gospel and Jesus? What have you experienced and what do you know? Can you convey that information to others in a way that helps connect it to the larger story? And, ultimately, are you someone other people consider to be trustworthy in this regard?

Find a quiet corner to read Hebrews 11, then ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the places in your life where you are not acting as a trustworthy witness to the life of faith. Is it because you are being silent? Are your words and actions not in sync? Invite God to better form you into the image of his Son so you might “run with endurance the race God has set before us” (Hebrews 12:1b).

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*

April 2

## Learning to Love

By Shan Reed

**[. . .] and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:11)**

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

"No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you



are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them. [. . .] So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." (John 13:1–17, 34 NLT)

As we approach the culmination of the Lenten season, in today's Gospel reading we find Jesus in one of the humblest scenes of his life outside of the cross. Jesus is literally taking the posture of a servant to wash the feet of his disciples.

Jesus has spent three years with these disciples, teaching them about the upside-down Kingdom of God, performing miracles, showing them how to live as his disciples and friends. The disciples do not know it, but Jesus knows they are gathering for the final meal they will share before his death.

Reading the story of Jesus humbling himself to wash the disciples' feet seems to fly in the face of Philippians 2:11, where every tongue will declare Jesus Christ is Lord. The man who has humbled himself to the position of a servant to wash feet will be proclaimed as Lord.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be in that room? Everyone talking and laughing, maybe recounting the events of the past few days, especially Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, with everyone shouting, "Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel" (John 12:13)! That is the image we humans have when we think of the world declaring Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jesus shows us another way.

I wonder how quickly quietness fell on the group as Jesus took off his outer garment and knelt down with the basin of water. Did others also say something to Jesus as Peter did, or were they so shocked they just watched him move from person to person washing feet?

Take a moment to go back and read the passage again as though you are in the room. Imagine what the experience may have been like for those present.

What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel, both physically and emotionally?

Talk to God about what you have experienced, and ask him to help you learn to love as he has loved us.

God in an apron, kneeling  
I couldn't believe my eyes.  
I was embarrassed  
    until his eyes met mine  
I sensed my value then.  
He touched my feet  
He held them in his strong, brown hands  
He washed them  
I can still feel the water  
I can still feel the touch of his hands.  
I can still see the look in his eyes.

Then he handed me the towel  
    and said,  
“As I have done  
So you must do.”  
Learn to bow  
Learn to kneel. (A portion of a poem by Macrina Wiederkehr from her  
    book *Seasons of Your Heart*.)

*Shan Reed is the NAB Director of Mobilization.*

April 3

## God's Good Plan to Crush

By Nathan Solak

**[. . .] and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:11)**

Who has believed our message?

To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm?

My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot,  
like a root in dry ground.

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance,  
nothing to attract us to him.

He was despised and rejected—

a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.

We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.

He was despised, and we did not care.

Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;

it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God,

a punishment for his own sins!

But he was pierced for our rebellion,

crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.

We have left God's paths to follow our own.

Yet the LORD laid on him

the sins of us all.

He was oppressed and treated harshly,

yet he never said a word.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.



And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,  
he did not open his mouth.  
Unjustly condemned,  
he was led away.  
No one cared that he died without descendants,  
that his life was cut short in midstream.  
But he was struck down  
for the rebellion of my people.  
He had done no wrong  
and had never deceived anyone.  
But he was buried like a criminal;  
he was put in a rich man's grave.

But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him  
and cause him grief.  
Yet when his life is made an offering for sin,  
he will have many descendants.  
He will enjoy a long life,  
and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands.  
When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish,  
he will be satisfied.  
And because of his experience,  
my righteous servant will make it possible  
for many to be counted righteous,  
for he will bear all their sins.  
I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier,  
because he exposed himself to death.  
He was counted among the rebels.  
He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels. (Isaiah 53 NLT)

Despised. Rejected. Pierced. Crushed. Beaten. Weighed down. Whipped. Oppressed. Silent.  
Unjustly punished. Cut short. Struck down.

These are dark words. These are intense words. These are words of death and injustice. When we hear these words, they bring up emotions in us. Maybe anger, regret, sadness, frustration, deep introspection, or even confusion. Because, after all these words about what will happen

to the suffering servant, the plan is declared as good. Not just once, but twice! God declares that all these awful things that are going to befall his servant are part of a good plan. What a paradox!

I'm not sure how your church celebrates Good Friday, but we have our service at night. It's dark, the music is somber, and the mood is different than any other event that happens in our sanctuary. Even our funerals have a lighter feel than our Good Friday service does. All that is intentional. We set this day aside to remember the death on the cross. The most awful type of death a criminal could die in the ancient world was assigned to the innocent Messiah who had done absolutely nothing wrong.

It ought to give us pause that we call such a dark day “good.” How do such bad things happen to such a good person like Jesus? Because it is part of God's good plan. God's good plan is not always good in our thinking. Every time I read through this passage, my heart cries out from within me saying “NO!” How could God do this to his only Son?

I think Good Friday is a time for us to be real and honest with what happened to Jesus. I could write for hours on what Good Friday means and how it should impact us and how we are supposed to live our lives in light of the sacrifice. But I wonder if, instead, you would take time to read Isaiah 53 a few times and really sit with the misery and agony this passage brings. Sometimes we are far too quick to get to the resurrection. So, this Good Friday, set aside some time to reflect on this dark day, the day that seemed like darkness won and the day our Savior was crushed as part of God's good plan.

*Nathan Solak is the lead pastor at Ridgewood Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin.*



April 4

## De-Centered

By Michael Benson

**[. . .] and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:11)**

Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away. With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes. Following Jewish burial custom, they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth. The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:38–42 NLT)

For nearly seven weeks now, we've been on a Lenten journey together, looking at Philippians 2:5–11 with the mindset of trying to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, our Servant King. Keeping this servant-hearted attitude and heart in our daily lives is no easy task. Ultimately, it means de-centering ourselves from our own story.

Everyone who has ever lived inherently sees themselves as the star of their own show, the protagonist in their own life story. But as Christians – as people who have proclaimed our allegiance to the Servant King – we are instructed to live our lives for God, with him at the center rather than ourselves.

This is a radical restructuring of how we organize not just our lives but our entire worldview!

Thankfully, we have examples to look to.

Joseph Arimathea feared the Jewish leaders and therefore followed Jesus in secret, but after the death of his rabbi, he no longer cared. He de-centered himself from his own story, forsaking his own reputation so he might care for the body of his Messiah.



Likewise, Nicodemus was someone who sought out Jesus privately when he was alive, but after Jesus died, he brought 75 pounds of ointment for his burial; not only was this well beyond the normal amount used for a typical body, it also likely cost him a great deal of money. This is not a purchase he can keep secret like he could a one-on-one meeting in the night. Nicodemus also learned to de-center himself from his own story so he might glorify his Savior, anointing him like royalty.

Pulling back further, even Jesus de-centered himself from his own story. Though his death, burial, and resurrection are the center spoke around which all history turns, he did not do any of it for his own glory. “He humbled himself in obedience to God” (Philippians 2:8); in fact, if God had given him another way, he would have taken it: “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine” (Luke 22:42).

If Jesus – the central figure of creation who initiated and is even now bringing about the restoration of all creation – puts God’s will above his own, we have no excuse to not do the same.

Of course, this is no easy task.

When we are sick. When our car won’t start. After we receive bad news. While folding laundry, taking out the trash, and washing the dishes. As we commute to work or spend time by ourselves. In the celebrations, the difficulties, and the boring and mundane, we are to live as servants of the King through every thought and action.

Praise be to God that this is not a task we undertake on our own. Because of the cross we commemorated yesterday and the empty tomb we will celebrate tomorrow – and through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us – God has given us all we need to proclaim that “overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us” (Romans 8:37b).

*Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.*