

Enemy at the Gate

By John Malham • Study download 3

SESSION 3 — CHAPTERS 7-10

CHAPTERS 7-8

Salt and Restraint / The Knot

Theme: Salt preserves. The resurrection holds. Everything else is built on these two things.

READ FIRST — Open your Bible to these passages before continuing.

Matthew 5:13

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

Salt preserves. It works quietly. Most people don't notice it until it's gone — and by then the rot has already set in. Your presence as a man anchored in God's Word is a preserving force. Your absence is felt more than your presence ever was.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present."

This is Paul's earliest creed — written within 20 years of the crucifixion, when eyewitnesses were still alive and could be questioned. Over 500 people saw the risen Christ at once. This is not mythology. This is testimony.

1 Corinthians 15:17,20

"And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins... But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

Paul does not soften the stakes. If the resurrection is false, everything is false. He invites the test. And then he announces the result: now is Christ risen. The tomb was empty. The Knot holds.

THE TEACHING

Restraint is not weakness. It is the strategic deployment of strength — knowing when to hold, when to act, and when to stay silent. Salt does not call attention to itself. It works quietly to prevent rot. Jesus said 'You are the salt of the earth' (Matthew 5:13) — not salt in

a shaker on a Sunday shelf, but salt in the wound of a decaying culture, preserving what can be preserved and making people thirst for something they cannot quite name. The presence of a man anchored in God's Word in a family, neighborhood, or workplace is a restraining force. When that restraint is absent, the rot advances faster than anyone expected.

Restraint collapses in degrees. The standard lowered here, the boundary crossed there, the conviction quietly traded for comfort over time. Rarely all at once. This is why the warning signs are so easy to miss — each individual step looks small. But trace the steps backward from any collapse you have witnessed, and you will find the first compromise was smaller than anyone imagined. The question is not whether the pressure to compromise is real. The question is whether you catch it before the wall is breached, or after.

Now the Knot. This is the single event on which the entire faith rests — and it is either true or it is not. The question is no longer whether God exists. The evidence from design, from prophecy, from manuscript reliability presses in one direction. The question has become: which God? And only one religious figure in history set a testable deadline about himself: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19). Three days. Not someday. Not metaphorically. Three days.

Rome was a machine of death. When it executed, there were no mistakes. Roman guards were professionals whose lives depended on their prisoners staying dead. The swoon theory — that Jesus merely fainted and revived — is not just unlikely, it is absurd. A man scourged to the edge of death, nailed through wrists and feet, stabbed with a spear, wrapped in burial cloths, and sealed in a stone tomb does not wake up, roll away a stone, overpower guards, and convince his followers he conquered death. Rome knew how to kill. And they made sure Jesus was dead. Then the tomb was empty. The authorities could not produce the body. And the terrified disciples who had hidden in a locked room on Friday were standing in the streets of Jerusalem on Sunday proclaiming the resurrection — within walking distance of the tomb, in front of the same authorities who killed Jesus. If the body was there, they produce it. The movement dies in an afternoon. They couldn't. Because the tomb was empty.

Here is what seals it: people will die for something they believe is true. But people do not die for something they know is a lie. If the disciples invented the resurrection, they knew it was false. And yet one by one they went to their deaths proclaiming it true — Peter crucified upside down, James beheaded, Thomas speared, Stephen stoned while praying for his killers. Not one recanted. Not under torture. Not facing execution. Liars make poor martyrs. They had seen Him. The Knot holds.

- Salt preserves quietly. The man anchored in God's Word in his home, workplace, or neighborhood is a restraining force against cultural rot — when he is absent, things decay faster than anyone expected.
- Restraint collapses in degrees — one small compromise at a time. Trace any collapse backward and the first step was always smaller than it looked.

- The resurrection is not mythology — it is the most documented, most publicly attested event of the ancient world, made in front of enemies who would have stopped it with a corpse if they could.
- People do not die for something they know is a lie. Twelve men who knew whether the resurrection happened went to brutal deaths refusing to recant. That is the logic of blood.

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." — 1 Corinthians 15:20

1. Where in your life are you functioning as salt — a preserving, stabilizing presence? Where has that function eroded, and what has filled the space?
2. Restraint rarely collapses all at once. Trace back a collapse in your own past: what was the first small step? What would it have taken to stop it there?
3. The resurrection is described as 'the Knot that holds everything together.' How does its certainty — or uncertainty — actually change how you live on a Monday morning?
4. If you knew beyond all reasonable doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, what would you do differently in your life right now? Why aren't you doing that?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Identify one standard in your life that has been slowly eroding — one compromise at a time. What was the first step in that direction? What is the first step back? Write both down and share one of them with someone this week.

CHAPTERS 9-10

Through the Valley / The Changing of the Guard

Theme: God is not absent in your hardest season. He is forming you for the next one.

READ FIRST — Open your Bible to these passages before continuing.

Psalms 23:4

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Through. Not around. Not rescued from. Through. God's promise is not that you will avoid the valley. It is that you will not walk it alone — and that you will come out the other side.

Romans 8:28

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

All things. Not the easy things. Not the things that make sense. All things — including the pit, the prison, the years of silence, the season that looked like God had forgotten the address. He didn't.

Genesis 50:20

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

Joseph said this to the brothers who threw him in a pit and sold him into slavery. That is the view from the other side of the valley. You cannot see it from the pit. You can only trust the Thread until you can.

THE TEACHING

The valley is not punishment. In Scripture, it is consistently a place of preparation. Moses was formed in 40 years of wilderness before he ever stood before Pharaoh. Joseph spent years in prison — not because God had forgotten him, but because God was building something in him that the palace couldn't produce. David wrote his most honest psalms from inside caves while Saul's army hunted him. The valley is where the Thread is most hidden. It is also, consistently in Scripture, where God does His most significant work.

Tsalmavet — the Hebrew word in Psalm 23:4 translated 'shadow of death' — is a compound: shadow (tsal) and death (mavet). The valley of the shadow of death. But notice: David says 'I will walk through it.' Not around it. Not be rescued from it. Through. God's promise is not that you will avoid the valley. His promise is that you will not walk it alone, and that you will come out the other side. 'For thou art with me' — four words that change the meaning of every hard season.

The changing of the guard is the moment when God shifts a man from one season to another — one assignment ends and another begins. It rarely feels like a promotion. David was anointed king by Samuel, then sent back to the sheep. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream correctly, then sat in prison for two more years while the cupbearer forgot him. The transition between seasons is often the hardest place to stand, because you can see that the old thing is ending but cannot yet see what the new thing will be. This is where most men either push ahead of God or collapse behind Him.

Grief is not the enemy of faith. Lament — honest, unfiltered, ugly conversation with God — is the posture of a man who still believes God is listening. The Psalms are full of it. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Psalm 22:1) — the cry of a man whose circumstances felt like abandonment, but whose trust never actually left. Jesus quoted that psalm from the cross. He was not in despair. He was praying Scripture in the darkest moment of history. That is the model: bring the full weight of your hardest season to God, in the language of Scripture, and watch what the Thread reveals when you look back.

- The valley is not punishment — it is preparation. In Scripture, God's most significant formation work consistently happens in the hardest seasons, not the easiest ones.
- The promise of Psalm 23 is not rescue from the valley — it is presence through it. 'Thou art with me' changes what the valley means.
- The changing of the guard rarely feels like a promotion. It feels like an ending. But it is always the Thread moving — God shifting you from one assignment to the next.

- Lament is not a failure of faith. Bringing your honest pain to God in the language of Scripture is the posture of a man who still believes God is listening.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." — Psalm 23:4

1. What valley are you in right now, or what valley most recently formed you? What made it hardest — was it the pain itself, or the silence, or the feeling that God had stepped back?
2. Can you identify a moment in your past that looked like failure or abandonment — but looking back, you can now see what God was building in it? What do you see differently?
3. How do you distinguish between a season God is calling you through and one you are prolonging through disobedience, fear, or refusal to move?
4. Where do you sense the 'changing of the guard' in your own life right now — the thing that is ending, and the thing you cannot yet see coming?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Write your own psalm — honest, unpolished. Tell God exactly where you are and exactly what it feels like. Then, at the end, name one thing you can see the Thread doing in this season — even if it is only one small thing.

Prayer and next step

What will you put into practice before your next meeting? Who will you pray for?
