

# THE WEEK CALLED HOLY



ADDISVILLE CHURCH LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Cover Design by Natalie Kelly.

**Now before the Feast of the Passover,  
when Jesus knew that his hour had  
come to depart out of this world  
to the Father,  
having loved his own who were in the  
world, he loved them to the end.**

(John 13:1)

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## A Word from Pastor Doug,

In his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey shared how a study by the University of Chicago revealed that more has been written about Jesus in the past 20 years or so than was written about him in the first 19 centuries. He is easily and without a doubt the most talked about — and the most scrutinized — character in all of history. As powerful and inspiring as His teachings and His miracles were, they are not central to His purpose in coming to earth.

Back when Mary first told Joseph that she was expecting a child, Joseph's plan — since he knew the child could not be his — was to quietly break off their relationship so that Mary wouldn't be subjected to public disgrace. But then an angel of the Lord came to Joseph and said...

*"Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus..."*

And this is the part I want you to hear...

*...because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21)*

From the very beginning, this was God's plan, that he would send his Son to save us from our sins. That's because, in case you haven't noticed, we have a little bit of a sin problem. And when I say "sin problem," I'm talking about the entire human race. We are alienated and separated from God. We are broken. We are fallen. This is the primary problem with which everyone struggles, and it's the reason why Jesus came into this world — to save us from eternal death to eternal life (*Romans 6:23*), so that which isn't right within us can be made right through him. The events of that final week leading to the cross are the culmination of our Savior's purpose in coming. My prayer for you is that this Lenten study will deepen your love and devotion to Jesus Christ, The Lamb of God.

Blessings,  
Pastor Doug

## **A Word from Pastor Ryan,**

Lent 2023

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior!

And I thank you in advance for answering the call of the Holy Spirit to open this book up, to join in this church-wide study of *The Week Called Holy*. Much prayer and planning has gone into this time together and I simply can't wait to see and hear all the incredible things God does in and through us as we set apart time and space to dwell in His Word together over the next six weeks.

I would like to thank Pastor Carol Peters and the La Casa de Christo Lutheran Church for sharing this resource with Addisville Church. I would also like to thank Bob Proske, Natalie Kelly and our Christian Education Committee for the significant work and prayer that you have poured into shaping this experience for the glory of God and the good of His people at Addisville.

As you journey further into Holy Week and walk through these tender moments with Jesus it is my deep prayer that you will see Him and know Him more than you already do. Something tells me you are familiar with most of the details of Holy Week. And yet there is so much still for us to see and know about the Love of God for you and me in Jesus Christ our Savior and Friend!

As you journey through these next six weeks in your own study, alongside others in small groups, and as a body of believers each Sunday, be encouraged, be strengthened, be stretched, and be amazed at what great and awesome things Christ does for you and me in *The Week Called Holy*!

In Christ,  
Pastor Ryan

## THE WEEK CALLED HOLY

The Lord Jesus, through all of the events of Holy Week, shouts to us: "I LOVE YOU!" This Lent we will be walking with Jesus through those events from Palm Sunday through Easter.

Our focus in this devotional study will be on Jesus – His motives, His decisions, His actions and words, and as far as they can be discerned, His emotions. Other key persons will also figure into the study but as supporting characters. Our eyes will be on Jesus.

Each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) spotlights the moment Jesus turned away from His ministry in the northern province of Galilee and began the journey to Jerusalem and the Cross. "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). The King James Version says Jesus "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." The English Standard Version reads, "He was determined to go to Jerusalem."

The Gospel of Mark notes that Jesus was walking out in front of His disciples, leading the way, while they followed behind, "and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid" (Mark 10:32). Obviously something in Jesus' demeanor led them to leave Him to His own thoughts that day while at the same time creating a degree of foreboding among themselves.

Perhaps Jesus was pondering the "Suffering Servant" passages in Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-10; 52:13-53:12) which He knew He had come to fulfill. There we read, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (53:6). Indeed, Jesus' determination mirrored that of the Suffering Servant: "Because the Sovereign Lord helps Me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, *I have set My face like flint*, and I know I will not be put to shame" (Isaiah 50:7).

Then suddenly Jesus stopped, "took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to Him" (Mark 10:32-34). Jesus spoke of His arrest and trial, His being scourged and put to death, and of His resurrection, but as Luke 18:34 tells us, "The disciples did not understand any of this."

Jesus' determination in going to Jerusalem and to His death shows us that He was fully convinced that His sacrificial death was God's explicit will. When the disciple Peter tried to dissuade Him, Jesus told Peter that he was thinking like the devil (Matthew 16:22, 23). Jesus' resolve shows us that He entertained no thoughts of turning aside. He was devoted to the will of God.

Things of importance to us – ambitions, comfort, popularity, financial security, absence of conflict, freedom from pain, the presence of pleasure – mattered little to Jesus as He set His face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus once explained that what mattered to Him was *not* pleasing Himself but pleasing His Father who sent Him (John 5:30).

We do well to keep in mind throughout this devotional study that all that Jesus faced, He faced FOR US. All that Jesus suffered, He suffered FOR YOU and FOR ME. Oh, how He loves us!

May the Holy Spirit open our minds and hearts to see Jesus more clearly, to understand Him more fully, and to follow Him more faithfully this Lenten season.

Your sister in Jesus,  
Pastor Carol Peters

## **BEFORE WE BEGIN...A word about the chronological order of events**

It is impossible for us to know exactly what Jesus did each day of Holy Week or even the order of some of the events because they differ from Gospel to Gospel. The dinner at Bethany, for example, takes place in John the day before Palm Sunday while in Matthew and Mark, it occurs during Holy Week in order to provide a striking contrast between the love shown by Mary and the betrayal by Judas. Moreover, in Matthew and Mark, there is one week between Palm Sunday and Easter, but Luke's Gospel implies that there was a longer period between Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and Good Friday. "Each day Jesus was teaching at the Temple," and people came early each morning to hear Him (Luke 19:47; 21:37, 38). Matthew and Mark condense His teaching in the Temple that week into one day.

In addition, unlike the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), in John the Last Supper falls on the Day of Preparation for Passover – not on Passover itself – meaning that Jesus was nailed to the cross on Friday at the exact time the Passover Lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple.

**The theological meaning of the week's events was clearly of more importance to the writers (and to the Holy Spirit!) than an hour by hour, chronologically accurate report of Jesus' activities.**

The Synoptic Gospels and John also differ with regard to the trips Jesus made to Jerusalem. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' entire ministry took place away from the southern province of Judea until He journeyed to Jerusalem and the Cross. John, on the other hand, describes many visits Jesus made to Jerusalem (2:13; 5:1; 7:1-10, etc.).

Given that all Jews were expected to go to Jerusalem during Passover every year as well as at Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, we can assume Jesus did so also. The other Gospel writers simply chose (*under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*) not to write of those visits, centering instead on His Galilean ministry to the north. We know Jesus had developed a close friendship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus – who lived in Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem – indicating that He must have spent time with them in Judea on more than one occasion, e.g. Luke 10:38-42.

That being said, the accepted "traditional" chronology of Holy Week is as follows:

Sunday	Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, greeted by Hosannas (Palm Sunday)
Monday	Jesus cleansed the Temple, driving out the merchants
Tuesday	Jesus taught in the Temple and the religious leaders tried to entrap Him
Wednesday	A day of rest, probably spent in Bethany
Thursday	Jesus ate His last supper with His disciples and prayed in Gethsemane
Friday	Jesus was tried, convicted, and crucified
Sunday	Jesus rose from the dead

### **And a few names to recognize**

**The Pharisees** When the Seleucid Empire ruled Mesopotamia, they tried to Hellenize the people they ruled, including the Jews. A Jewish sect arose (c. 175 BC) to counter their attempts, advocating strict observance of the Law given to Moses and to the Jewish traditions handed down over the centuries. They took the name Pharisees from a word meaning "separate," and they chose to stay separate from sinners like tax collectors and Gentiles. Generally, they were

respected for their extreme devotion, although by Jesus' day, they had become very legalistic. Some Pharisees were priests, but most were laymen located throughout Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. Although many of them opposed Jesus, not all of them did. **Nicodemus** (John 3; 7:50-51; 19:38-40) was a Pharisee. They were the only sect to survive the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. They helped re-define Judaism after that disaster and kept the faith alive.

**The Sadducees** The Sadducees included the aristocracy of Jerusalem, and most of them were priests. They accepted only the five books of Moses (Genesis – Deuteronomy) as authoritative, rejecting belief in angels, demons, and the resurrection. Their focus was the Temple and its activities. They had little interest in a Messiah, preferring to keep their privileged positions under the current status quo. This sect disappeared after Jerusalem and the Temple were razed (70 AD).

**The Scribes** Dating back to the time of Ezra, the work of the scribes was to interpret and teach the Laws of Moses. They were legal experts, esteemed for their extensive education.

**The Sanhedrin** The Council or Sanhedrin operated as both a legislature and supreme court. The High Priest presided over this group of 70 priests, scribes, and lay leaders (elders). Some were Sadducees and some were Pharisees. They oversaw both religious and civil concerns under Rome's ultimate authority. When they wanted Pilate to try Jesus, Pilate told them to "Judge Him by your own law" (John 18:31). Since they had no authority to execute anyone, however, they wanted Jesus judged and condemned by Pilate. That meant death by crucifixion, not by stoning.

**The High Priest** The High Priest could be called the CEO of the Temple as well as the head of the Sanhedrin. In Jesus' time, Rome appointed and deposed the High Priest as Rome saw fit. **Annas** had served as High Priest from 6 to 15 A.D. but was still held in high respect. When Jesus was arrested, He was brought to Annas first (John 18:12-13). **Caiaphas**, who served as High Priest from 18 to 36 A.D. and was Annas' son-in-law, oversaw Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. Both Annas and Caiaphas were Sadducees.

**Herod Antipas** When Herod the Great died shortly after the birth of Jesus, his territory was divided among his sons. Herod Antipas was made tetrarch of the northern region of Galilee under Roman authority. When his brother, **Archelaus**, proved to be an incompetent ruler over the southern region called Judea, which included Jerusalem, he was stripped of his position and a Roman governor was appointed instead. (The **Herodians** were a political party supportive of the Herodian dynasty, hated by the Pharisees.)

**Pontius Pilate** Pilate served as the fifth Roman governor of Judea (26 – 36 A.D.). His job was to maintain law and order and, in order to have received this position, he must have previously demonstrated considerable skill as a soldier and as an administrator. Secular history paints him as cruel, holding the Jews in contempt. He once robbed the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct. When his unjust slaughter of some Samaritans was reported to Rome, he was recalled.

**The Suffering Servant** Within the Book of Isaiah are various passages that describe one who will suffer for the sins of others and be despised and rejected. The most well known is Isaiah 53, which the Jewish Study Bible calls "one of the most difficult and contested passages in the Bible..."<sup>i</sup> Scholars debate the identity of the Servant saying it could be Isaiah himself or the Messiah or the nation of Israel. Jesus surely saw the passages as describing Himself. In fact, at His baptism, the words of God spoken over Him, "with Him I am well pleased" echoed words describing the Servant (Matthew 3:17; Isaiah 42:1). Christians clearly see that Jesus is the Suffering Servant.



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Please note that the quotations in this devotional often do not use inclusive language because they are direct quotes from books that were written before using inclusive language became the norm. It did not seem appropriate to make changes to what the authors wrote while putting quotation marks around their words. My apologies!

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## DINING AT BETHANY

Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus lived in Bethany and were among Jesus' closest friends. Jesus referred to Lazarus as His friend (John 11:11), and John also noted, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (John 11:5). When Lazarus fell ill, the sisters sent word to Jesus: "Lord, the one You love is sick" (John 11:3). Lazarus died four days before Jesus arrived, but Jesus shocked all the mourners by raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44).

When Jesus arrived again in Bethany, only days before His death, a dinner was given in His honor at the home of Simon the Leper, apparently a man whom Jesus had healed. Mary approached Jesus with an alabaster jar of pure nard, broke the jar, and poured the nard on Jesus. Nard was a very expensive perfume that came from India, generally packaged in alabaster containers. It was so valuable that it would only be used for very special occasions and only a couple drops at a time. Mary used all of it – about a pint, valued at a year's wages (John 12:3, 5) – shocking the disciples, who called it a "waste" (Mark 14:4-5). Wiping Jesus' feet with her hair added to their shock.

When the disciples turned on Mary with anger, Jesus defended her, saying she had done what she could for Him, calling her act "a beautiful thing" in preparing His body for burial (Mark 14:6, 8). Previously Jesus had warned His disciples of His coming death on at least three separate occasions, yet they remained clueless. They were clueless too about what Mary's deed meant to Him. Mary, however, had evidently realized that Jesus was headed toward His death.

**As one who had spent time at His feet (Luke 10:39; John 11:32), Mary had a spiritual sensitivity that noticed what the other disciples missed.** Bible commentator G. Campbell Morgan suggested, "This woman got nearer to the inner heart of Jesus than any human being prior to Pentecost."<sup>ii</sup> She understood that Jesus was going "to give His life as a ransom for many" as He had said (Mark 10:45), and so she did what she could. She lavished an extravagant gift on Him to show her love and devotion. Jesus' response shows us how much it pleased Him.

**Mary came to Jesus simply to do something *for Him* and to give *to Him*. Unlike most others, she did not come wanting to receive something *from Him*. No doubt, that brought Jesus great satisfaction. It was indeed one of the final acts of kindness He would receive before the Cross.**

Let us try and understand what her action meant to Him. There He was, humanly speaking hemmed in by blind hate; and here was one action of understanding love!...There He was in a dark and desolate land; and lo! out of the heart of a woman, a spring of fresh water sprung for the thirsty Christ! He valued it.<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus went on to say that her act of devotion would be told wherever the Gospel would be preached throughout the world (Mark 14:9). That was the only time He spoke of a memorial to or for anyone. Jesus wanted her act told because He desired all who heard to be motivated to act likewise, i.e. spending time at His feet and receiving spiritual insight, pouring out on Him true love and devotion, squandering – if you will – ourselves on Him without calculating the cost. Because Jesus is worth it. Because such devotion is precious to Him. Because Jesus gave His all for us.

***Loving Father, during this Lent, grant me the grace to do something beautiful for Jesus!***

## ENTERING JERUSALEM

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Sanhedrin had already marked Him for arrest and death. The chief priests had earlier given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, they were to report it so that He could be arrested. Accordingly, Jesus had been “hiding out” in a village called Ephraim (John 11:47-57). Human reason would have had Him return to the safety of Galilee or enter Jerusalem in secret as He had done once before (John 7:10). Instead, He stirred up the whole city by His entry (Matthew 21:10). Instead of hushing the crowds, He now invited their fervor, explaining that if the people kept quiet, “the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40). The Pharisees observed with dismay that “the whole world has gone after Him” (John 12:19).

Jesus preplanned His dramatic entry into the city, having made prior arrangements to secure a donkey to ride, then giving the code words to the disciples sent to fetch it (Mark 11:1-7). He purposely started out from the Mt. of Olives, a location certain to stir messianic hopes (Zechariah 14:4). He chose to enter right before Passover when the city was full of pilgrims. **Jesus’ actions were a deliberate, clear announcement that He was the fulfillment of prophecy: “Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). The Jews could not fail to understand His declaration. That Palm Sunday Jesus proclaimed Himself the Messiah, the long-awaited King.**

The crowd’s actions prove they believed Jesus was the Messiah. They threw their cloaks down before Him showing their willingness to submit to Him. They welcomed Him with palm branches as the Jews had welcomed Simon Maccabeus (c. 142 BC) after he drove their enemies out of Israel (I Maccabees 13:51). They cried “Hosanna!” a word that meant “Save now!” and shouted the words of Psalm 118:26, the psalm Jesus would later quote to support His claims (Matthew 21:42).

Clearly the people expected a Messiah who would defeat Rome and bring them freedom, but as Jesus later stated, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). In fact, conquering kings rode horses. Kings of peace, like Jesus, rode donkeys as Solomon had done (I Kings 1:32-40). How painful for Jesus to hear the crowd shouting for the very kind of king He refused to be.

Expectations played a huge role in the events of Palm Sunday, and the people’s expectations were running high that day! In a matter of days, those expectations would be crushed. After Jesus’ death, two of His followers expressed their deep disappointment: “We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). Jesus was indeed the Messiah, but the people needed to align *their* expectations of the Messiah with Scripture and with the words of Jesus.

**We too have our own expectations of Jesus. If they are built on *our assumptions* of how Jesus should act or on what *we think* He should do, we set ourselves up for disappointment.** When we assume “Jesus wants me to be *happy*,” for example, we forget that primarily He wants us to be *holy*. If we expect the Lord to keep us from hardship or tragedy, then any devastating event can make us question God’s goodness or accuse Jesus of failing us. Thus, knowing Scripture, knowing what Jesus has actually promised us, is crucial. When we rightly base our hopes and expectations on *God’s Word*, when we align our faith with what *Jesus* taught, we will never be disillusioned.

***Holy Spirit, keep my faith grounded on the Word of God. Let me find hope in Jesus’ promises.***

## WEEPING OVER JERUSALEM

On Palm Sunday, as He neared the city amid the joyous shouts of the crowd and the waving of palm branches, Jesus wept (Luke 19:41). The Greek word translated “wept” means more than shedding a few quiet tears. It indicates a heaving of the chest and sobbing, the experience of a deep sorrow. Jesus knew that Jerusalem would reject Him, but His sobs were *not* for Himself but for the city. Two days later, Jesus again voiced great distress for Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37).

Jesus’ grief was for the people and what their rejection of Him would eventually mean *for them*: their destruction in 70 A.D. “Your enemies will build an embankment against you,” Jesus warned, “and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another...” and all because “you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (Luke 19:43-44). The opportunity to receive salvation was within their reach, but they stubbornly refused to see and accept it.

Indeed, when Titus besieged Jerusalem, the suffering was intense: mass starvation, crucifixions, outright slaughter. Rome leveled the city and destroyed the Temple except for its Western Wall.

In the heaviness of heart that Jesus felt in foreseeing such suffering, He cried out, **“How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”** (Matthew 23:37). A hen sensing danger instinctively brings her chicks together to shelter and protect them. That image is used elsewhere in the Bible. Moses pictured God, leading His people through the wilderness, as a mother eagle protecting her young (Deuteronomy 32:11). David spoke of finding refuge “in the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 36:7).

Rather than anger over their unbelief and their rejection of Him, Jesus expressed only anguish. Bible commentator William Barclay noted, “The tears of Jesus are the tears of God when He sees the needless pain and suffering in which men involve themselves through foolish rebelling against His will.”<sup>iv</sup> Listen to God’s plaintive plea: “Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone...Repent and live!” (Ezekiel 18:31-32). Jesus would not force the people of Jerusalem – or anyone today – to turn to Him and believe but, at the same time, the Lord has decreed that all people *will* face the consequences of their choices.

**For now, for us, for people today, the invitation is still open, the invitation to draw near to Jesus, to believe in Him, and to let Him shelter us.** And still today, Jesus is grieving over those who reject Him, who insist on following the destructive road to hell rather than His road to eternal life.

While Jesus mourned Jerusalem’s coming destruction, in faith He saw ahead to a time when He *will* be welcomed: on His return at the end of the age. In this week of darkness and suffering for Jesus, we often find Him looking far ahead to a time well beyond the sorrows of this world, beyond the Cross, toward the joys of the Kingdom that is coming (Hebrews 12:1-2). Although on Palm Sunday, the Jewish leaders and most of Jerusalem would not join the crowd from Galilee singing, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” Jesus knew that they *will* sing those very same words to Him when He returns as King of kings and Lord of lords (Matthew 23:39).

***Lord Jesus, may Your invitation to me to come to You always find me running to You in response!***

## CURSING THE FIG TREE

Surely this is one of the most bizarre incidents recorded in the Gospels! If we did not know better, we would think Jesus acted in a self-centered, petulant way, cursing a fig tree because it had no fruit and He was hungry. **Prophets, however, often engaged in prophetic actions to reinforce their message, especially when the people seemed incapable of understanding their spoken words.** Jeremiah, for example, wore a yoke across his shoulders, pointing to the people's coming bondage in Babylon. Hosea married a prostitute to teach the people of the Lord's love for Israel.

In the early spring, figs begin to form on fig trees, and the leaves quickly follow, so if a tree has leaves, there should be some early fruit on it even if it is not yet the season for the fully formed, ripe figs. This early fruit (known as *taqsh* in Palestinian Arabic) is knob-like and, when the size of an almond, is edible.<sup>v</sup> This is the fruit Jesus expected to find. A tree without *taqsh* would not bear fruit later in the year either, even when the fruit was in season.

When Israel was in rebellion against the Lord, the Old Testament prophets compared the nation to a fig tree without fruit or a vineyard without grapes (e.g. Hosea 9:10, 16). Jesus earlier had told a parable about a fig tree that did not bear fruit and was scheduled to be cut down (Luke 13:6-9). On Monday of Holy Week, Jesus turned that parable into a drama. The message was the same.

Jesus' point was that Israel had failed to produce fruit for God. Their religious practice was all outward show – all “leaves” – without any real substance, i.e. fruit. Jesus' physical hunger was symbolic of God's unsatisfied hunger for faith and righteousness on the part of Israel. Such fruit was absent, and now God's judgment was coming, symbolized by Jesus' cursing the tree and its withering. John the Baptist, too, had warned the people, “The axe is already at the root of the trees,” and every fruitless tree would be cut down (Matthew 3:10).

The parable in Luke 13 shows God's patience. The owner of the tree had given it more than enough time to become fruitful, and at his servant's request, he gave it one more year. God is longsuffering and never quick to judge! When the Lord must finally discipline His people, we are told, “Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone” (Lamentations 3:32-33).

**Warnings of judgment are never easy to hear, but we must hear them.** Speaking to His own followers, Jesus said the Father “cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit” (John 15:2).

Christian life always involves “externals,” things we do as believers – attending worship, giving offerings, service projects, prayer, Bible studies – activities in which the people of Israel also were engaged. *The leaves!* Unfortunately, it is possible to engage in those activities without ever letting the Lord touch our hearts and minds and change us from the inside. Like the Pharisees, Christians can “follow all the rules” and yet be controlled by greed or pride or lust or other sins. **Producing fruit requires total honesty before the Lord and an openness to His Spirit.** If we ever sense we are only “going through the motions” of our faith, we need to stop immediately and take time to re-engage with Jesus! We will find Jesus is waiting for us! ***God forbid we should only bear leaves!***

***Holy Spirit, divine fruit-producer, grow Your fruit in my life!***

[See Galatians 5:22-23.]

## CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

The Temple in Jerusalem had a number of courts. The Court of the Gentiles was the only area in the Temple grounds that allowed the presence of non-Jews. It was in this court that the Temple business took place for the convenience of the worshippers. Pilgrims came to sacrifice to the Lord, but travelling with an animal to sacrifice was not always practical so the Temple had animals to purchase right there. The Jews were required to pay an annual Temple tax. It had to be paid with money that had no image on it because of the commandment prohibiting images of any form. In the Court of the Gentiles, one could exchange one's Roman currency for the proper kind.

The Temple aristocracy grew rich through these practices. Animals purchased within the Temple were far costlier than those purchased outside, but an animal from outside had to be inspected (for a fee) to make certain it was without blemish, and those animals were almost never approved for sacrifice. The Temple tax equaled two days' wages for the ordinary worker, but the fee to exchange one's money into Temple currency added another half-day's wages to what was owed.

Jews coming to worship no doubt came with devotion to God mixed with resentment against the priests. Any Gentile who had come to worship at the Temple, as the Greeks did (John 12:20), would have had to do so amid loud haggling over prices and the noise and stench of all the animals (sheep, cattle, doves) for sale – hardly an atmosphere conducive to worship.

Challenging the priests, Jesus defiantly drove all the merchants and their animals out of the Temple, threw over all the tables and benches of the moneychangers, scattering all their coins (Mark 11:15). Imagine the chaos! Merchants travelling from the Mount of Olives into the city often used the Court of the Gentiles as a shortcut. Jesus put a stop to that, *singlehandedly* not allowing anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts (Mark 11:16).

*Where were the Temple guards?* Evidently, Jesus acted with such an air of authority and power that they were cowed into doing nothing to stop Him. Once before they had been sent to arrest Jesus, and when asked why they had not, replied, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:45-46). They also feared the people who were hanging on His every word (Luke 19:48). **If our image of Jesus is only that of a mild-mannered, gentle, lover of little children and lambs, we need to open our eyes to reality! We see in the Temple that Monday His wrath, His passion, His physical strength, His courage, and the powerful effect of the sheer force of His personality.**

Once the Temple was cleansed of its inappropriate and corrupt activities, "The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them" (Matthew 21:14). The next day, He would teach all day at the Temple. For a short time, the Temple would be the place it was meant to be.

At Jesus' Jewish trial, He was accused of saying He would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days (Mark 14:58). John explains Jesus meant the temple of *His body*, killed and raised in three days (John 2:21). Yet, by His death on the Cross, Jesus *did* destroy the Temple with its worship centered on animal sacrifice. It was no longer needed. His was the sacrifice made once and for all time for sin, the only Sacrifice that can truly cleanse us and set us free (Hebrews 10).

***Lord Jesus, thank You for cleansing me; may I ever be a temple fit for your presence!*** [1 Cor. 6:19]

## MAINTAINING CONTROL

The Bible makes clear that Jesus was fully in control of events. He was not a hapless victim of the religious establishment nor an unfortunate martyr. We see Him acting with great intentionality every step of the way. In His entry on Palm Sunday and in His cleansing of the Temple, Jesus was “throwing down the gauntlet.” He was deliberately challenging the authorities in a way they could not ignore. They had already decided that He had to die, but they wanted to wait until after the Passover so as not to cause a riot among Jesus’ many supporters (Matthew 26:3-5).

Jesus, however, had come as the Lamb of God to give His life as a sacrifice (John 1:29). The lambs sacrificed during Passover brought to mind the blood of the lambs on the doorposts in Egypt, saving the people from death and bringing freedom from slavery (Exodus 12). Jesus’ death was to be *during* Passover so that people would come to realize His death was a sacrifice bringing them salvation. When His enemies tried to seize Him on previous occasions, they had failed because His “hour” or “time” had not yet come (e.g. John 7:30), but now Jesus’ knew the hour *had* come. His actions would push His enemies to act on *His schedule* and not their own.

Jesus stated frankly, “**I lay down My life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord**” (John 10:17-18). Jesus recognized that God had put everything that week under His control and that He had come from God and was returning to Him (John 13:3). When asked during His trial if He realized that Pilate, His judge, had power to set Him free or to crucify Him, Jesus dismissed Pilate’s assertion and told him that he would have no power at all over Him if it had not been given to him by God (John 19:11). Jesus, not Pilate, was in control.

**In fact, circumstances that week were *never* out of His control. Not for a moment. Jesus was the Master of the situation. Nothing happened that caught Jesus by surprise** (Luke 18:31-33; John 18:4). Even as He was arrested, Jesus declared that He could call on the Father who would “at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels” (Matthew 26:53). Even the means of His death, a Roman cross, was according to God’s plan, not those of Jesus’ enemies (John 18:31-32), who had tried twice to stone Him (John 8:59; 10:31), the Jewish form of execution.

Jesus knew that all He was about to do had been set forth in the purposes of God before the creation of the world. Peter would later preach that Jesus “was handed over to you by *God’s set purpose and foreknowledge*; and you...put Him to death” (Acts 2:23). Jesus had come to earth on a mission, and He was determined to see it through to the end. He courageously lived and died in complete surrender to God’s will, fully trusting the Father to raise Him from death.

On Good Friday, it *appeared* that Jesus had lost control, that His mission had failed. No doubt, His followers were devastated by that turn of events. They must have asked, “Where is God in all of this?” We ask that question too when it feels as if everything has fallen apart. There are times when it is hard to see God’s hand in a situation, but **the Lord has never relinquished control. There is still nothing that catches Him by surprise, nothing that He cannot see us through.** [See Isaiah 43:2.] As God’s children, we can be assured that *nothing can touch us* unless God can use it to achieve His purpose for us and for the world (though we may not yet *understand* His purpose).

***Loving Father, help me to remember that You are always in control and that I can trust You.***

## WEEK ONE

## THE WEEK BEGINS

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND/OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

If you are reading this devotional study as part of a weekly discussion group, whether face-to-face or online, the general outline for each week's discussion session applies to you. (*The questions in italics are for personal reflection, not for group sharing.*) There are probably more discussion questions than your group will have time to cover each week. Choose the ones you want to discuss, saving the rest to cover if you have enough time.

#### **BUT BE SURE TO COVER QUESTIONS #1 & #12 EACH WEEK!**

If you are reading this devotional study on your own, without participating in a group, the discussion questions can also be used for personal reflection. In that case, use the weekly study guides *daily* to reflect on the one or two questions listed for each day's reading. *The questions designed specifically for personal reflection are in italics.* You might want to journal your answers.

**In either case, start your discussions or reflection time with prayer for the insight only the Holy Spirit can give into God's Word and into our own hearts and minds.**

**Get-acquainted time** Introduce yourselves to one another with 1) your name, 2) where you went to high school, and 3) what you liked most about high school. Be brief!

**The members of my group are...**

#### **Group discussion/Personal reflection questions**

1. Which one of this week's six devotions caught your interest the most? Why that one?
2. Day 1. What are some ways we can show our love and devotion to Jesus today?
3. Day 1. In the world's view, the time we spend at church and the offerings we give are a waste of time and money better spent elsewhere. How would you explain and/or defend that use of your time and money?

*Day 1. How much time do you spend at the feet of Jesus? Is that amount of time adequate for really getting to know Him?*

4. Day 1. Jesus was "at home" spending time in Bethany with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Do you think Jesus would feel right at home in your house? Why or why not? Would you feel comfortable having Him as a guest? Why or why not? (You do know, of course, that Jesus *does* live at your address with you!)



5. Day 2. Has the Lord ever disappointed you? If you are willing, tell the group about it. How did you resolve your feelings of disappointment? Or have you?
6. Day 2. As Christians, we do know that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and our King. What are some of the implications of living under the rule of Jesus Christ?
7. Day 3. William Barclay [*Matthew*, Vol. 2, page 300: see Sources Used] says, “The nation which rejects God is doomed to disaster.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
8. Day 3. Describe someone you know – if you know such a person – who stubbornly refuses to believe in God, who rejects Jesus, and will not surrender his or her life to Him. What could you do to help that person and those like them to change?

*Day 3. When in your life have you felt especially sheltered by the Lord? Take a moment to thank Him. Do you need to be sheltered by Him today? Tell Jesus now about your need.*

9. Day 4. G. Campbell Morgan [*Matthew*, page 280: see Sources Used] wrote that “if Jesus must pronounce a doom, it will be with tears, but it will be pronounced.” Does the thought of Jesus pronouncing judgment shock you? Disturb you? Why or why not?
10. Day 5. Why do you suppose Jesus is so often pictured outside of Scripture in such a “meek and mild” or “tame” way?

*Day 5. The Bible (1 Corinthians 6:19) says that the bodies of believers are temples of the Holy Spirit. Ask yourself, “Is there anything in me that Jesus wants to cleanse right now in order to make me a fit temple for His Spirit?” Let Him!*

11. Day 6. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being “I have no confidence” and 10 meaning “I am 100% convinced,” how confident are you that God has control over the circumstances of your life? Over the world situation?
12. Share with the group what you have learned or remembered about Jesus this week.

*Think about what you have learned about Jesus this week. How is it starting to impact your life? In other words, what difference has it made to you?*

**Prayer requests**      Share with the group any needs for which you would like the members of your group to pray during the week.

**Close in prayer**      Ask God to bless your group this Lent with a deeper knowledge of Jesus, a closer walk with Him, and with growing friendships among the members of your group.

## TUESDAY'S FIRST CONFRONTATION

On Tuesday, Jesus came to the Temple and began to teach as He had on many previous occasions (e.g. John 7:14; 8:2). The Temple officials interrupted Him, demanding He tell them on whose authority He was acting. Still furious at His cleansing the Temple, they really were asking, "Who or what gives You the right to disrupt business in God's House?" As custodians of the nation's religious life, they had a right to ask although they had already concluded He had no authority.

Jesus responded with a question of His own, asking them if they knew whether the ministry of John the Baptist had been commissioned by God or whether John had merely acted under his own volition. They had investigated John (John 1:19-27), but they had not put any faith in him. If they *had* believed John the Baptist, they would have welcomed Jesus because John had declared Jesus to be the One for whom they were waiting: "I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). Rather than anger the crowd that believed John had been a prophet, these "custodians of the truth" gave Jesus a dishonest but safe answer: We don't know. Jesus accordingly gave them no answer to their question, knowing they would only try to misconstrue His words.

Instead, Jesus responded with a parable, recorded only in Matthew, in which a father instructs his two sons to work in his vineyard. The first tells him "No," but then goes to work anyway. The second says that he will, but does not. Which son was obedient? Obviously, the first.

Jesus then proceeded to point to the tax collectors and prostitutes who believed John the Baptist, repented, and were baptized. While their lives had not started out in obedience to God, they did a turn-around (the meaning of repentance). On the other hand, the priests and religious leaders, who appeared to be living in obedient service to God, did not believe John. They saw no need to repent although, in fact, they were the ones not doing the will of God, i.e. the second son.

**The point? "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you,"** Jesus told them (Matthew 21:31). Moreover, the fact that sinners did repent and that their lives had changed for the better because of John's preaching should have proved to the leaders that John's ministry was indeed commissioned by God, yet they still refused to believe. **Jesus' parable and its point shocked and enraged the religious aristocracy. The religious leaders, out of fear, had given Jesus a "safe" answer to His question, but Jesus certainly was not "playing it safe"! He did not cushion the truth or mince His words. What boldness!**

Still today the worst sinners who truly repent are welcomed into God's Kingdom before those who only give lip service to God (Matthew 15:7-9) no matter how outwardly moral their lives appear. For those of us who have been Christians for as long as we can remember, we do well to examine our lives. Are we Christians only because our parents were, because it is who we are, or are we in a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ? Do we worship because it is simply "something we do" as part of our cultural identity, or do we truly praise, adore, and honor our Father in heaven? Do we keep a Bible on our nightstands because every home should do so, or do we open it daily and listen for God to speak to us? Of course, neither of the sons in the parable was ideal. To say "Yes" to God and then to live obediently according to His will throughout all our days is the best!

***Lord, correct me please whenever I start acting like the second son, neglecting to do Your will.***

**TUESDAY'S SECOND VOLLEY**

Jesus told a second parable that day – **the parable of the tenants** – in which the owner of a vineyard rents it out to tenants, a common practice back then. The absentee landlord would be paid with money or a percentage of the harvest, which was collected by the landlord's servants.

Unlike most of Jesus' parables, this one is an allegory with the vineyard representing Israel and the owner God. God's prophets were represented by the servants, and the religious leaders of Israel – priests, scribes, Pharisees – by the tenants. The tenants in the story mistreat the servants and give them nothing, so in the end, the owner sends his own son whom the tenants murder. His hearers did not need great insight to realize Jesus identified with the son. He had not come merely as a prophet, but as the Son of God, and Jesus knew the "tenants" were plotting to kill Him.

To their horror, Jesus then announced God would take the Kingdom away from them and give it to others, i.e. the Church soon to be birthed (Matthew 21:43). Israel would lose her special status before God. **"Seldom did Jesus make so great a claim, fling down so unmistakable a challenge, utter so terrible a threat."**<sup>vi</sup> Jesus' hearers would remember God's threat to turn His vineyard into a wasteland (Isaiah 5:1-7). The parable made it clear such judgment was well deserved.

That story was followed by **the parable of the wedding banquet** about a king who gives a banquet for his son (Matthew 22:1-14). As was the custom in Jesus' day, when all was ready, messengers were sent to those who'd previously said yes to the original invitation to tell them the time when they were to arrive, usually later that same day. In Jesus' story, some of the invited responded with indifference, paying no attention to the messenger but going off to tend to their own concerns. Others treated the messengers with hostility. Again, the meaning was clear. Because those invited (Israel) would not come, God has now opened the banquet to everyone (Gentiles).

Before reacting with any conceit because we Christians now have the place of favor with God, we do well to read Romans 11:17-24. **God's Word warns us, "Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches [Israel], He will not spare you either."**

Jesus told a similar parable (Luke 14:15-24) in which the banquet invitees all make what sound like reasonable excuses for not attending. The host then declares that not one of them "will get a taste of my banquet." We need to understand that banquets in that culture were significant social events and **to refuse an invitation was a grave insult to the host, showing contempt for him.**<sup>vii</sup>

When we become too busy with our own activities and responsibilities, when spiritual disciplines like worship, prayer, and Bible study drop way down in our daily to-do lists, do we give thought to what our neglect says to the Lord? We are quick with excuses: out-of-town guests, our children's schedules, deadlines, fatigue, etc. Does heaven judge them "lame"? **We should never, ever, take our relationship with the Lord for granted! Never, ever, dare we presume on His grace!**

While our salvation is not in jeopardy – we are saved by grace! – we risk losing out on many of the blessings the Lord has for us when we say no to time with Him in worship, prayer, and His Word.

***Lord, may I never ever show contempt for You by neglecting Your call to devotion and obedience.***

## TUESDAY'S THIRD ROUND

Knowing Jesus had spoken the three previous parables against them, “the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words.” Although they hated one another, the Pharisees and the Herodians conspired together (Matthew 22:15-16) to issue the first challenge to Jesus: whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. A no answer would have made Jesus liable to prosecution by Rome; a yes answer would have turned the crowd, who hated Rome, against Him. And that was the idea – to discredit Jesus before the crowd who hung on His every word (Luke 19:48).

The Sadducees tried next with a ridiculous question designed to make the idea of resurrection seem absurd. The final attempt, regarding the commandment that is the greatest, came from one of the lawyers. Jesus answered each time in such a way that the people were astonished (Luke 20:26). Even some of the scribes responded, “Well said, Teacher!” (Luke 20:39).

Then it was Jesus’ turn to question them. He quoted Psalm 110:1 in which King David wrote, “The Lord [i.e. God] said to my Lord [i.e. to the Messiah], ‘Sit at My right hand...’” (Matthew 22:44). The Jews knew Psalm 110 told of the Messiah who would be a descendant of David. In fact, Son of David was a title for the Messiah. Jesus then asked the Pharisees how David in Psalm 110 could call one of his own descendants, one of his sons, “Lord” (Matthew 22:45).

The key to understanding Jesus’ argument is that absolutely no one would refer to a son or any descendant as “lord.” A son was always to pay deference to the father; the father did not give deference to the son. It simply was not done. The son submitted to the father and not the other way around. So how is it that David ignored this established tradition and calls a son of his “Lord”? In other words, **how could the Messiah be both David’s son and yet be David’s Lord?** Jesus was leading them to the conclusion that the Messiah had to be more than David’s son. **He is God.**

“No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask Him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46). If Jesus’ enemies saw where He was leading in asking them about that verse, they did not admit it. They clearly did not like the implications. Or perhaps their bias against Jesus blinded them to the right answer. Or maybe it was intellectual pride. Or fear.

Years later, the Apostle Paul gave the answer to Jesus’ question: “as to His human nature” Jesus was a descendant of David, and by His resurrection, Jesus “was declared with power to be the Son of God” (Romans 1:1-4). **Psalm 110:1 points both to the Messiah’s human nature and to His divine nature. Jesus is fully man and fully God. Jesus is both the son of David and He is Lord.**

**The identity of Jesus will always be a defining issue for humanity. Jesus is either God or He is not.** At some point, every person must face the question Jesus first put to His disciples: “Who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:29). And every person must answer for herself, for himself. *Is Jesus God?* There is no fence straddling. There is no middle answer. There are only two camps.

The implications are life changing no matter how we choose to answer His question, “Who do you say I am?” Not only for this life but for eternity as well!

***Lord Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God “eternally begotten of the Father, God from God...”<sup>viii</sup>***

## REJECTED

In Tuesday's controversies, Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22-23: **"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes."** The Apostle Peter quoted the same passage in a sermon, pointing to Jesus as the stone rejected (Acts 4:11). The image of the rock or stone is common. God is often called *the Rock* (e.g. Deut. 32:4, 18, 30; Psalm 18:2). In Zechariah 4:7, *the capstone* has messianic implications. Paul called Jesus the chief *cornerstone* on whom the Church was built (Ephesians 2:20; see Isaiah 28:16). Isaiah 8:13-15 refers to "a stone that causes people to stumble," a rock that will cause many in Jerusalem to fall and be broken. The Church proclaimed that Jesus is that *stumbling stone* (I Cor. 1:23; I Peter 2:8).

For Jesus, Psalm 118:22-23 conveyed both His sorrow and His confidence. Rejection is a horribly painful experience for anyone. These verses also show His belief that the rejection He faced would not have the final word. His Father would exonerate Him, giving Him the place of honor.

Jesus' rejection began when His own brothers would not believe in Him (John 7:5). Although many people *did* believe in Him, most of the Jews did not (John 1:11). John observed, as Jesus' ministry was coming to a close, "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him," and then he explained that they could *not* believe because God had blinded their eyes (John 12:37-41). This does not mean God caused their unbelief! It was their refusal to believe that doomed them to become people who could not believe. "Because they *would* not accept Him, there came the day when they *could* not accept Him."<sup>ix</sup>

On Good Friday, that rejection became even more painful to bear. It was the custom that one prisoner would be set free by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, during Passover. Pilate asked the crowd if they wanted him to release Jesus, and they shouted, **"No, not Him!"** (John 18:40). They wanted Barabbas, an insurrectionist and a murderer (Luke 23:19). A brief time later, when Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" the chief priests responded, **"We have no king but Caesar"** (John 19:15), a final rejection. To hear them own Caesar as their only king – a title they reserved for God alone – must have shocked even Pilate. Their hatred of Jesus was that strong.

What must it have meant to Jesus to hear those shouts of rejection and hatred by the very people He had come to save, the people He longed to gather to Himself as a hen gathers her chicks? Not only that, but one of His own disciples had betrayed Him and the rest had deserted Him after He was arrested, all except John and Peter, who later denied knowing Him (John 18:15-17). **Not only was He facing physical torture on the cross, Jesus also endured the psychological agony of rejection and being forsaken by those closest to Him** (John 16:32).

When Jesus said, "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed" (Luke 20:18), he was warning the Jewish aristocracy that they would destroy themselves if they condemned Him. But they did and they were. The picture of a stone crushing those it falls upon is from Daniel 2:44-45, a reference to the last days. Surely, Jesus did not speak those words with vindictiveness but with the deep pain and sorrow of a parent forced to stand by and watch his/her beloved child, now an adult, stubbornly make a disastrous decision.

***Jesus, may I never choose or place anyone or anything before You. You are mine and I am Yours.***

## A SOLILOQUY

When He had finished teaching, Jesus took a seat in the Court of Women, where the treasury was located, and watched people give their offerings (Mark 12:41-44). It was perhaps at this time that some Greeks, who had travelled to Jerusalem during Passover to worship in the Court of the Gentiles, came to the disciple Philip and said, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus” (John 12:21).

Philip and Andrew told Jesus of their request, which prompted a soliloquy from Jesus, and we do not know if the Greeks ever had the opportunity of a special meeting with Him. **Jesus’ words show that His coming death did occupy His thoughts and trouble Him even if one does not see that as He engaged with the crowds, His enemies, and His disciples.**

Perhaps the thought of foreigners wanting to see Him brought the brief thought to His mind of all the people He could reach throughout the Empire if He would live beyond the young age of 33. Jerusalem had rejected Him, but there were many more people hungry for the truth He brought. At the same time, Jesus knew that His death and resurrection would result in the Gospel spreading to the whole world. That was clearly on His mind when He noted that a kernel of wheat remains alone unless it falls to the ground and dies, but when it dies, it multiplies (John 12:24).

Then Jesus candidly confessed, “Now My heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’” Without missing a beat, Jesus answered His own question: “No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour” (John 12:27).

Our Lord knew that He was facing suffering and death, and His humanity responded to this ordeal. His soul was troubled, not because He was questioning the Father’s will, but because He was fully conscious of all that the cross involved. Note that Jesus did not say, ‘What shall I do?’ because He knew what He was ordained to do. He said, ‘What shall I say?’ In the hour of suffering and surrender, there are only two prayers we can pray, either ‘Father, save me!’ or ‘Father, glorify Thy name!’<sup>x</sup>

Indeed, Jesus did associate the Cross with glory. He began His soliloquy, “The hour has come for the Son of Man *to be glorified*” -- not “*to be crucified*” although He was referring to the cross – and He ended with “Father, *glorify* Your name!” A response came from heaven, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again” (John 12:23, 28). **The Cross glorifies both the Father and the Son because “it is the most stunning display in all of history of the love and grace of our God.”<sup>xi</sup>** Jesus then confidently declared that it is the Cross that “will draw all people to Myself” (John 12:32).

Jesus expressed similar emotions earlier when He said that He had “a baptism to undergo” – a reference to His death – “and how distressed I am until it is completed” (Luke 12:50). The word used there “implies being torn between two emotions. On the one hand, Jesus cannot but dread His impending death on the cross. On the other, there is glory for Him and all humankind beyond the grave, thus His eager expectation.”<sup>xii</sup> And His expectation was satisfied. We are assured that Jesus was “crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). Now He reigns in glory forever!

***Jesus, I thank You for Your love and courage, for Your obedience to the Father, for Your sacrifice.***

## A TRILOGY OF PARABLES

When Jesus left the city, His disciples pointed out the magnificent buildings of the Temple. Jesus prophesied, in response, of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and of the signs of His return. These teachings (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36) are called the Olivet Discourse.

Jesus, as part of that Discourse, also taught three parables intended for the Church that was soon to be born. All three feature the absence of the key figure – the master of the house, the bridegroom, and the man on a journey – as well as the responsibilities of those waiting for his appearance. Two of the three highlight a delay in his appearing. Obviously, Jesus is the One who will soon be absent, leaving the Church to continue His work while we await His return.

The **first story** (Matthew 24:45-51) is a strong warning to leaders in the Church not to abuse the people they are called to serve but to care for them, nourish them with the Word of God, and support them in their own areas of service. Leaders are not to take advantage of their position. The threat to cut the abusive servant to pieces (eastern hyperbole) makes clear the serious nature of such sin and the painful regret and loss the disobedient servant will feel when Jesus returns.

Parables are stories that have one strong point, and Jesus certainly made a strong point in the **second parable** (The Ten Virgins, Matthew 25:1-13): **we must *always* be ready for His return.** Not only ready, but joyfully expectant – every day, every minute because He could come at any time. **For that matter, each Christian should always be ready for that moment when the Lord will call us home! The time *will* come – we don't know the hour – when each one of us will go to Him.**

The foolish women in the parable were not despicable sinners, but they were negligent. In first century Israel, wedding guests would often buy oil *after* they arrived in the town where the wedding was to take place so that they would then be prepared for the long wait for the groom. (It was traditional for the groom to delay and come at an unexpected hour.) Maybe these women had been sidetracked by other activities or the fun of seeing old friends and socializing as they waited and they never got around to getting oil. And then it was too late. Neglecting spiritual responsibilities is all too easy! Telling ourselves we still have lots of time is not a good idea.

In the **third parable** (The Talents, Matthew 25:14-30), three servants are given various amounts of their master's wealth to tend in his absence. Two make a profit with their portion while the third does nothing with his. The master rewards the first two servants while rebuking the third. **We are to use for the Lord that which He has entrusted to us – abilities, money, time, opportunities, etc. How *much* we have been given is not as important as how *faithful* we are in using those gifts.**

One day, we will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. He will not judge us for our sins as these have been forgiven, cleansed by His blood. It is *our works* that will be judged, our service to Him (Romans 14:12; II Corinthians 5:10) to see if we merit a reward. The rewards handed out will apparently be greater responsibilities in His Kingdom, positions of service to the King. Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe notes, "While everyone who has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior is going to heaven (John 3:16-18; 17:24), not every believer is ready to meet the Lord."<sup>xiii</sup> Are you??

***Lord Jesus, when You return, may You find me ready, faithfully using all Your gifts for Your glory.***

## WEEK TWO

## TUESDAY, DAY OF CONFLICT

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND/OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

#### Open in prayer

**Get-acquainted time** If the members of your group were new to each other last week, then re-introduce yourselves today. Briefly in a sentence or two, thinking of all Jesus' parables, tell the group which is your favorite, if you have one. (And it is OKAY if none comes to mind!)

#### Group discussion/*Personal reflection* questions

1. Which one of this week's six devotions caught your interest the most? Why that one?
2. Day 1. America is now considered a post-Christian society, and church membership is in decline. Converts from Asia and Africa, to paraphrase Jesus, are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of our own youth. What part can we play in seeing this trend turn around?
3. Day 1. How can Christians today keep from becoming like the Pharisees of Jesus' day?

*Day 1. As you look at your own lifestyle, which of the two sons in Jesus' parable does it resemble more? What steps can you take to become more obedient to the Lord?*

4. Day 2. Read Appendix B. Jesus' announcement that the Kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to others in no way justifies any antisemitism. What can Christians do to combat antisemitism especially among our fellow Christians?
5. Day 2. The closing paragraphs say we should never presume on God's grace. What do you think that means? How do Christians sometimes presume on God's grace? Or do we?

*Day 2. When opting to put an item on your "to do" list ahead of your commitments to the Lord, have you often told yourself, "God will understand"? The invited guests in Jesus' parable of the banquet (Luke 14:15-24) probably also thought, "Surely our host will understand." Make a decision today to avoid making lame excuses to the Lord!*

6. Day 3. There are always people who claim to admire Jesus yet cannot believe He is God. C.S. Lewis once said any person who claims to be God is 1) delusional and mentally unbalanced, or 2) a liar trying to deceive others, or 3) who he claims to be. No one admires a person who is either delusional or deceptive! Therefore, you cannot admire Jesus unless you go all the way and believe His claims about Himself.

What do you think of Lewis' argument?

7. Day 4. If you have ever experienced rejection and are willing to talk about it, share with the group how it felt, how you were able to cope with that rejection, and how you moved on in spite of it. How might it have helped to realize Jesus also knew that pain?
8. Day 5. Jesus said, "Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant will also be" (John 12:28). What do those words mean to you?



9. Day 5. Referring to Jesus' soliloquy (John 12:23-28), J. Vernon McGee [*Matthew – Romans*, page 448: see Sources Used] wrote, "We tend to whimper and cry and complain and ask God why He lets unpleasant things happen to us. With Christ, we should learn to say, 'Father, through this suffering and through this pain, glorify Thyself.'"

How difficult is it for you to accept pain and suffering and to trust God through it, praying that He will use your suffering for His own purpose and glory?

Do you find it gets easier as you grow older? Or has it become more difficult?

*Day 5. If you are currently enduring suffering of any type, speak to Jesus about it. Ask for patience in suffering and His help in responding to your suffering in a way that honors God.*

10. Day 6. In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the one talent man tried to blame his failure on his master whom he described as hard, i.e. demanding and cruel. In what ways do people today sometimes try to blame God for their own failures?

*Day 6. If you have blamed God for things that have gone wrong in your life that deep down you realize were your own fault, spend some time confessing to the Lord the unfairness of your accusations against Him.*

11. Day 6. Share with the group how you feel knowing that Jesus will judge what we have done (or not done) for Him and that our works will be rewarded (or not) accordingly.

12. Share with the group what you have learned or remembered about Jesus this week.

*Think about what you have learned about Jesus this week. How is it starting to impact your life? In other words, what difference has it made to you?*

**Prayer requests** Share with the group any needs for which you would like the members of your group to pray during the week. Share, too, any answers to prayer for which you want to thank the Lord.

**Close in prayer** Pray for people you know who do not believe in Jesus. Pause and allow members of your group to state those names before the Lord (first names only please!). Ask for wisdom and courage for the times when people ask you questions about your own beliefs. Pray for Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith.

## JESUS AND THE SERVANT'S ROLE

On Thursday evening, Jesus and His disciples gathered together in an upper room of a home in Jerusalem for their final meal together, although the disciples did not realize it as such. It was the annual celebration of Passover. At the table, they argued about which of them was considered the greatest. They still thought Jesus would set up His Kingdom soon, and they were anticipating their places in that Kingdom (Luke 22:24) – not Jesus' death on a cross.

It was an old argument going back to their time in Capernaum (Mark 9:33-34). Shortly before Palm Sunday, James and John angered the others by asking Jesus for positions of honor in His Kingdom, the seats to His right and to His left (Mark 10:35-41). **Jesus repeatedly pointed out that greatness in His Kingdom was much different. Greatness in His Kingdom is displayed by a willingness to serve, and it is humility that is valued.** Jesus explained that He had not come to *be served* but *to serve* (Mark 10:45), even describing Himself “as one who serves” (Luke 22:27).

That night Jesus demonstrated in a very dramatic way what He meant. Because of the dusty roads back then and the sandals everyone wore, feet quickly became dirty. In many homes, there was a basin of water near the entry where feet could be washed. To wash another person's feet was the job of a slave. In fact, in Jewish culture, it was even too lowly a job for a *Jewish* slave and had to be performed by a *Gentile* slave (or by a woman or a child!). Disciples of the various rabbis in Jesus' time were expected to perform many services for their rabbi, but they were *not* expected to wash his feet. That was simply too demeaning.

When Jesus tied a towel around his waist – the mark of a slave – and then proceeded to kneel before each one of them in turn to wash their feet, they surely were stunned beyond belief. Simon Peter was horrified and told Jesus, “Never!” Pope Benedict wrote that **by this one symbolic act, Jesus pictured “the whole of His saving ministry.” He set aside His divine splendor, came to earth, and in humility He washes each one of us to make us fit for the Kingdom of God.**<sup>xiv</sup>

Jesus' security in His own identity – knowing He came from God and was going to Him – enabled Him to take a slave's roll without hesitation (John 13:3-5). Jesus did not worry about His dignity. He knew of the glory He had had with the Father before the world began and would enjoy again (John 17:5), and so He “made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant” (Phil. 2:7).

Jesus then explained that He had given them (and us!) an example to follow.

We ought not to imagine ourselves too high and lofty for any kind of assistance, however apparently degrading...Acts of love never degrade, however menial they may be. They did not degrade the Lord of Glory; how then should they degrade us, His unworthy servants?<sup>xv</sup>

We too can find security in our identity as God's children. We know we will live with Him forever. Therefore, like Jesus, we do not need to fear the servant's roll either nor cling to our privileges, rights, or even our dignity. Jesus did not. If we ever feel offended when given a task “beneath us,” picture Jesus kneeling before His disciples, *before you*, with a basin and a towel around His waist.

***Lord Jesus, remind me again and again that greatness in Your Kingdom begins in humble service.***

## JESUS AND JUDAS

After He had washed His disciples' feet, Jesus became noticeably troubled [the Greek word means disturbed, agitated], and then He announced that one of the Twelve was going to betray Him (John 13:21). He told them the betrayal was a fulfillment of prophecy (Psalm 41:9) and not unanticipated. He did not want the betrayal to shake their faith. At the same time, although prophesied, the betrayal by a close friend was obviously and understandably troubling to Jesus.

Jesus' announcement of the betrayal may also have been a call to Judas to reconsider. Jesus let Judas know that He knew Judas was the one, but other than John, none of the other disciples were told (Matthew 26:25; John 13:25-26). They had not heard His words to John as they were busy trying to figure out among themselves who could do this. Jesus also pronounced a frightful warning to the betrayer, another call to *PLEASE STOP* while there was still time: "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24).

The way in which Jesus chose to identify the betrayer to John, presenting Judas with a piece of bread soaked in the sauce dish, was the way in which a host honored a guest. In our culture, it would be like raising a glass to an honored guest. Judas that night had also been given a place of honor next to Jesus. Surely, Jesus was telling Judas the door was still open for him to come back.

**His treachery now known – and warned of judgment to come – Judas could have confessed, asked forgiveness, and been restored. Jesus was as ready to forgive him as He would later forgive Peter for denying Him.** Instead, Judas left the supper and went to the priests to tell them they had to act now, not waiting until after Passover to arrest Jesus as they had wanted. Their plot had been discovered. (Thus Jesus' words that He would die *during* Passover would be fulfilled.)

Although Jesus had recognized long before that Judas would betray Him and that he was a thief (John 6:70-71; 12:6), He showed Judas the same love and patience He showed the other disciples, so much so that the others had no idea who the betrayer was until Judas led the soldiers into Gethsemane. Judas knew Jesus would be there. Jesus knew that he knew and did not disappoint him. There Judas identified Jesus with a kiss, the traditional way of greeting one's rabbi.

Bible scholars have debated for centuries Judas' motive, and many theories have been set forth from greed to patriotism (supposedly to push Jesus to use His power against the Romans). One interesting idea is that Judas may have been one of many who had hoped Jesus would overthrow Rome to set up His Kingdom and then was angered by Jesus' refusal to be that kind of a Messiah. Irate that *he had wasted three years of his life* following a Messiah he had hoped would reward him with a good position in His Kingdom, Judas sought revenge. The Bible puts it much more simply: "the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus" (John 13:2).

Judas was at the Jewish trial of Jesus. When they condemned Jesus and decided to take Him to Pilate, he was filled with remorse. ***Even then he could have thrown himself down before Jesus as Jesus was led away, asking His forgiveness. And Jesus would have forgiven him 100%.*** Instead, he tried to undo his deed by returning the money. Then he committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5).

***Savior, I am so grateful that there is no sin that You will not forgive if I repent and turn to You.***

## JESUS AND HIS INCREDIBLE GIFT TO US

When Jesus gathered with His disciples on Thursday evening, He expressed His strong feelings about their time together. “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). *Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words* says the word translated as “eagerly desired” expresses a deep, fervent longing and in fact, is often used in a negative sense to mean “lust.”<sup>xvi</sup> Jesus longed to be with them that night not merely to celebrate another Passover. His earnest desire focused on the gift He would give them that evening.

**In a few hours, Jesus would hang from the cross, His body broken, His blood shed. But that night it was His joy to impart to His followers the benefits His suffering would achieve for them.**

He had come to give His life as a sacrifice, and now we see His true feelings about His sacrifice. From before the creation of the world, knowing humanity would disobey and fall under bondage to sin and death, Father and Son planned for our redemption (Revelation 13:8). Now after thousands of years of human history, the hour had come. The Son of God would soon redeem humanity and at last break those chains of sin and death. The prince of this world was about to be driven out and defeated (John 12:31)! In anticipation of the victory soon to take place, Jesus could hold out the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life to His followers. Indeed, He was eager to do so!

So Jesus “took the bread, gave thanks and broke it” (Luke 22:19). Perhaps He recited the *berakah*, the traditional Jewish mealtime prayer of thanksgiving, but probably that had been said before the meal itself began. **For what was Jesus thankful as He faced the cross? From eternity, it was His desire to save us, and now His desire was about to be fulfilled as He became our Savior.**

Because of what He was about to do in giving His life, He could establish a new covenant (Luke 22:20), a covenant sealed with His blood. Covenants in the Bible defined the basis of the relationship between the Lord and His people. In Exodus, the covenant, also ratified by blood, set forth obedience to God’s Law as the basis of the relationship. That Thursday night, Jesus established a new covenant based on grace. We can be forgiven, made children of God, through faith in Him (John 1:12-13). There is now no condemnation for those who believe in Christ (Romans 8:1). And so, Jesus joyfully gave thanks that Thursday night in the shadow of the cross.

Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it. **“This is My body given for you”** (Luke 22:19). Bread has long been a symbol of our need for sustenance. Now we see that our life is dependent on and sustained by Jesus. God’s Son took on flesh and blood, a body, so that that body could be broken for us. Then He said, **“This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you”** (Luke 22:20). It is only His blood that cleanses us (I John 1:7; Hebrews 10:14), and so He shed it freely. **Jesus withholds nothing of Himself from us!**

When we come to the Communion Table, Jesus still eagerly desires to meet His followers here to bestow on us all the gifts that He won for us by His death and resurrection. Jesus remains thankful that He can save us, transform our lives, usher us into the Father’s presence, and grant us eternal life. Rather than a somber preoccupation with His death, Holy Communion is truly a celebration!

***Lord Jesus, how amazing to think of You eager to meet me at Your table. I will be there with joy!***

## JESUS AND HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

During Thursday night's meal, Jesus spoke intimately with His disciples about the matters on His heart and mind, preparing them for the new reality that was coming when He would be physically absent from them but when they would experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This conversation is recorded only in John 13-16 and is called the Upper Room Discourse.

Part of the way through the conversation, Jesus said, "Come now; let us leave" (John 14:31). They left the upper room and crossed the Kidron Valley on their way to a garden called Gethsemane. Jesus continued teaching them as they walked along.

While still in the upper room, Peter had asked Jesus where He was going. Jesus' response, given a few minutes later, includes one of the most beautiful promises of Scripture. "In My Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3).

The old translation, many "mansions," gives a misleading picture. The more literal translation is many "dwelling places." The earliest Christians would have pictured a very large home with many rooms surrounding a central courtyard where extended family members could gather.

**The good news, however, is not the kind of living quarters we will enjoy for eternity, but the fact that we will be with Jesus! Forever!** Any speculations about what heaven will be like might be interesting, but the only thing that truly matters to the Christian is that we will be with the Lord, enjoying fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as well as with one another forever.

Jesus' reference to His coming back is a broad promise with many layers of meaning. Jesus came back to His disciples after the Resurrection, but it was not at that time that He was to take them home. Jesus also came to them – and comes to us – in the gift of the Holy Spirit, first given to believers at Pentecost (Acts 2). The Spirit enables us to enjoy daily fellowship with Jesus *now*. And Jesus' words also remind us that He will return to earth on the last day (Matthew 24:30-31).

**Especially precious to us is knowing that Jesus' words also mean that He will come back to each one of us when our own time comes to depart this earth.** Jesus will lead us home. What comfort that promise gives – not only for the moment of our death, but throughout our lives as we face trials and troubles. God's Word tells us "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). We can face whatever life throws at us knowing we have a heavenly destination. From the perspective of eternity and our eternal home, what we face today are "light and momentary troubles" (II Corinthians 4:17).

In fact, **Jesus Himself endured the cross in part by keeping His focus on eternity and the joy He knew was coming (Hebrews 12:2).** Joy not only for Himself, but the joy He felt in knowing that He could now open the doors to His Father's house to each of His followers. Jesus had prayed only hours before facing the cross, "Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am..." (John 17:24), and because of His death on the cross, that prayer could be answered.

***Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me and wanting me to be with You! That's the best news ever!***

## JESUS AND THE STRICKEN SHEPHERD

As Jesus and His disciples walked toward Gethsemane, Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of Me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Matthew 26:31). Jesus was quoting Zechariah 13:7 which actually states: “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, against the man who is close to Me!” declares the Lord Almighty. “Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered...” That dreadful prophecy would be fulfilled that night.

“The man who is close to Me” is the translation of a rather unique Hebrew phrase that literally reads “the man who stands next to Me.” That Hebrew phrase is translated in different versions of the Bible in a variety of ways including My associate, My companion, and My partner. One commentary notes that it could be translated as “the man who is My fellow,” meaning “the man who is My equal.”<sup>xvii</sup> **What seems quite bizarre is that it is God Himself who is calling for the sword to strike the Shepherd, this one who stands so close to Him.**

That Jesus quoted this passage as a prophecy about Himself (the Shepherd) and His disciples (the sheep) is significant, giving us some understanding of His own inner consciousness of His mission. Like the Suffering Servant passages which describe the Servant as “stricken *by God*” (Isaiah 53:4), this passage likewise tells us that Jesus’ death was orchestrated *by God*. We see Jesus “going, not as a Victim, mastered by human brutality and malice, but as One walking along the pathway where the severest mystery of pain would be the smiting of the Shepherd by Jehovah Himself.”<sup>xviii</sup> It is as if God the Father was the One who would drive the nails.

**This would be *totally* beyond our comprehension without Scripture showing us that it was the love of God for sinful humanity – for us – that prompted His striking His Shepherd. Jesus took our sins. He who knew no sin at all was made to be sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). He became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). Therefore, God’s judgment fell on His own Son. What an amazing testimony to the love of both Father and Son to take such extreme measures to save us!**

Jesus quoted the passage to assure His disciples that their deserting Him was also prophesied and so He was aware of what they were about to do. All of the disciples insisted that they would never run away even if they had to die with Him (Mark 14:31). Jesus did not argue with them, but He did want to warn them. It may have even been His way of telling them that when the soldiers came to arrest Him, they needed to get out of there and quickly! In fact, Jesus did tell the soldiers that since they were looking for Him, to let His disciples go (John 18:8). Although they did not realize it, Jesus was indeed in control of the situation, so the soldiers did let them go – even Peter who had attacked one of them (John 18:10)! Without Jesus’ protection, they would have killed Peter.

Along with this sobering prophecy from Zechariah, Jesus gave them a promise showing His own confidence in God and His understanding of God’s plan: “After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee” (Mark 14:28). Not only did His promise reflect His own assurance of the resurrection, it also told the disciples that their deserting Him would not be the end. They would be welcomed into fellowship with Him again – *as He welcomes us back even when we have failed Him miserably.*

***Father God, Lord Jesus, I stand amazed and humbled in the presence of Your great love for me.***

## JESUS AND PETER

Peter's insistence on Thursday evening that he was ready to die for Jesus is recorded in all four Gospels as is his later denying – three times – that he even knew Jesus. All four Gospels also record Peter's attacking one of those who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane although only John gives us his name. When Jesus was arrested and all the other disciples fled, Peter and another disciple, probably John, followed Jesus at a distance. Peter is a difficult man to figure out!

Thursday evening, Jesus warned Simon Peter, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). With those words, **Jesus revealed a profound truth: Satan cannot test us or touch us without the Father's permission. Job 1-2 also teaches us Satan is limited; he can only do what God allows.**

What was Satan's intention for Peter? The same as his intention for Job, i.e. to show that his faith was shallow, that he was a "summer soldier and a sunshine patriot," to quote Thomas Paine. To push him into failure and from failure to despair as he did with Judas. Why did God allow Satan to test him? Perhaps to show Peter that his confidence could never be in his own bravery which easily would fail him. Maybe to refine him as gold is refined; Peter himself later wrote of God's refining process (I Peter 1:6-7). Or it could be that the lesson he learned would be valuable to pass on to others. We do not know. Nor do we always know why God allows *us* to be tested!

Peter was not left to himself in that trial because Jesus assured him that He had prayed for him "that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32). Jesus knew Peter would deny Him and told Peter so, but He also knew that Peter would repent, that Peter's faith would remain intact through it all. "And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers," Jesus told him, letting Peter know his failure would not be permanent, that he would still be Peter the Rock (Matthew 16:18). **Jesus interceded for Peter, and even now He is interceding for us (Romans 8:34).**

Jesus told Peter he would deny Him, but Jesus did not *cause* Peter to deny Him anymore than the prophecy that He would be betrayed forced Judas to do so. Their choices were their own. For Peter, extreme self-confidence entered the mix. Contradicting what Jesus had just told him – *never a good idea!* – Peter boasted that if every other disciple deserted Jesus, he never would (Mark 14:29). Maybe the Apostle Paul, having heard Peter's story, was thinking of him when he wrote, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (I Corinthians 10:12).

In the courtyard of the high priest, while Jesus was on trial, Peter did deny knowing Jesus, and after his third denial, as Jesus had foretold, the rooster crowed. Hearing it, Jesus knew what had just happened, and in His compassion, He turned to search out His now heartbroken disciple. Jesus "looked straight at Peter" (Luke 22:60-61). The Greek word means a *focused* look, not a passing glance. Jesus did not *speak* to Peter, as that would have given Peter away as one who did indeed know Him. Jesus only looked at him. Had it been an angry look or an "I-told-you-so" look or an "I'm-so-disappointed-in-you" look, Peter might have joined Judas in suicide. What Peter must have seen was loving concern and forgiveness. That look, rather than destroying him, sustained him in his grief and no doubt in his considerable self-disgust.

***"In the hour of trial, Jesus plead for me, Lest by base denial, I depart from Thee. When Thou seest me waver, With a look recall, Nor from fear or favor, Suffer me to fall."*<sup>xix</sup>**

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND/OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

## Open in prayer

**Get-acquainted time** Re-introduce yourselves by name if yours is a new group this Lent. Share with the group how old you were when you received Holy Communion for the first time and in a sentence or two, one thing you remember about that experience. Be brief!

**Group discussion/Personal reflection questions** Remember, there are probably more discussion questions than you will have time to cover. Choose the ones you want most to cover, and start there. **BUT BE SURE TO COVER QUESTIONS #1 AND #12.**

1. Which one of this week's six devotions caught your interest the most? Why that one?
2. Day 1. I Peter 5:5-6 states, "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand that He may lift you up in due time." How do we clothe ourselves with humility? What does such humility look like? If you can, share an example with the group.
3. Day 1. Have you ever had a job or task (with or without pay) that many people might consider demeaning? If so, tell the group how you felt about it. What did you learn from that experience?  
  
How might we show appreciation to the people around us who take on those "thankless" jobs that so many people do not want to do?
4. Day 2. Pope Benedict [*Jesus of Nazareth*, page 68: see Sources Used] noted that people still come to the Lord's Table (Communion), and then go out and betray Jesus. He said there are always traitors at the Table. What do you think he meant? Do you agree?
5. Day 2. It is often said that every one of us, given the right set of circumstances, is capable of committing horrid deeds, and that is why each disciple asked Jesus, "Surely not I?" when Jesus said that one of them would betray Him (Mark 14:19). The example usually cited are the ordinary German citizens who committed atrocities during World War II. Do you think that theory is true or not? Why or why not?
6. Day 3. The Bible tells us that a wife's body belongs to her husband and that his body belongs to her (I Corinthians 7:4). Jesus has given His body for us, the Church, His bride. We in turn are urged to offer our bodies "as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1).  
In practical, every day terms, what does that mean?  
If you are having trouble answering, try Romans 12:2 and Colossians 3:23-24 for ideas!

*Day 3. Think about your feelings toward Holy Communion. Has it become merely a ritual for you or has it remained an encounter with Jesus? What significance does it have for you?*



7. Day 4. How does knowing you have a home awaiting you in heaven with Jesus affect the way you face life every day? Or does it?

*Day 4. Meditate for a few minutes on Jesus' promise, "I will...take you to be with Me." Pay attention to the emotions that promise stirs in you. And then thank Jesus for wanting you to be with Him and for making it possible that you will be!*

8. Day 5. Jesus quoted Zechariah to give the disciples one more reminder that His coming arrest – only a couple hours away – and death were all part of the divine plan. Why was it absolutely necessary, do you think, for the disciples to be assured of that?
9. Day 5. The Apostle Paul wrote that his preaching of "Christ crucified" was offensive to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (Gentiles), but in fact, the Cross demonstrated God's wisdom and power (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). What is there about God's plan to save humanity through Christ's death on the cross that people today still find offensive and/or foolish?
10. Day 6. Warren Wiersbe [*New Testament Commentary*, page 132: see Sources Used] asks if we, like Peter, talk when we should listen (Matthew 26:31-34), argue when we should obey (John 13:8), sleep when we should pray (Mark 14:37), and fight when we should submit (John 18:10-11). Which of those characterizations of Peter might also describe you?
11. Day 6. Referring to Jesus' looking at Peter after his third denial (Luke 22:60-61), Campbell Morgan [*Mark*, page 312: see Sources Used] wrote, "Never forget that the look of Jesus would have been wasted on Peter, if it had not been that Peter was looking at Jesus." The Book of Hebrews tells us to fix our thoughts and our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 3:1; 12:2). What can we do that would help us to keep our focus on Jesus? What helps you? Is it possible inwardly to be focused on Jesus 100% of the time? 75%? 50%? Occasionally?
12. Share with the group what you have learned or remembered about Jesus this week.

*Think about what you have learned about Jesus this week. How is it starting to impact your life? In other words, what difference has it made to you?*

**Prayer requests** Share with the group any needs for which you would like the members of your group to pray during the week. Share, too, any answers to prayer for which you want to thank the Lord.

**Close in prayer** Thank the Lord for the gift of Holy Communion, for His promise of a home with Him in heaven, and for whatever else comes to mind. Then join in praying the Lord's Prayer.

## JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

As Jesus and His disciples walked to Gethsemane, Jesus stopped and looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You" (v. 1).

**The first request in Jesus' prayer concerned Himself that He might bring glory to the Father. For Jesus, the Father's glory was Priority Number One.** To bring God glory means to honor Him by one's obedience and to exalt and esteem Him. To glorify God is also to display His nature, to picture for others what God is truly like. Throughout His ministry, Jesus brought glory to the Father (v. 4), but ultimately He would glorify God by His death on the Cross.

Jesus' own glory was a veiled reference to the Cross (John 7:39; 12:16, 23; 13:31-32) by which He would display the extreme, know-no-limits love and grace of the Father in saving humanity. He would also prove He was the One He claimed to be (John 8:28), the Savior of the world who gives eternal life to all His own (v. 3). His second request (v. 5) was that the way of the Cross would lead Him back to the Father and to the glory He had as God's Son *before* He set aside the prerogatives of His divinity to become man and to give His life for us (Philippians 2:6-8).

**The rest of Jesus' prayer was for His disciples to whom He had entrusted God's words and revealed the Father's nature (vv. 6-8) and for all who would believe in Him because of their message (v. 20).** Because in this prayer, Jesus our High Priest (Hebrews 6:19-20) is interceding for those who believe in Him, it is entitled Jesus' High Priestly Prayer.

**He prayed for their protection** (vv. 11-12, 15) as He was now commissioning them (v. 18) and sending them into a hostile world (vv. 14-15). It was not a prayer for protection from physical danger (His disciples were martyred!), but that their faith would be secure.

**He asked that His followers "have the full measure of My joy within them"** (v. 13). Jesus knew the joy of living in alignment with His Father's will and in knowing God is in control – a joy that is not in the least dependent on circumstances. *That* is the joy He wants for us.

**He prayed that we may be one** (vv. 11, 21-23). Jesus' desire to see unity in the Church does not mean we will all think alike or do things in the same way, but that we will all be connected to Him (and so to one another) as branches of the one Vine (John 15).

**He asked God to "Sanctify them"** (v. 17), to set them apart for His own purposes. Jesus did not want believers to be taken out of the world, but He wanted them to be able to live in it without being influenced and tainted by a society that is corrupt and self-serving.

Christians live by a different standard, by the values Jesus taught.

**The loving relationship with the Father and with Jesus His Son that is extended to all believers through this prayer is overwhelming.** Eternal life itself is defined as an ever-expanding experience of God (v. 3). Throughout the prayer Jesus referred to His followers as those the Father had given Him (v. 2, 6, 9, 24). Each believer – each of us! – is a gift of love from God the Father to His Son! Jesus then made the amazing declaration that the Father loves all of us "even as You have loved Me" (v. 22-23). We cannot begin to comprehend the depth of that love! Jesus' words, "I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am" (v. 24) assure us of our home in heaven!

***Lord Jesus, for this prayer and for all the others You have prayed for me, I am so deeply grateful.***

## JESUS' PRAYERS IN GETHSEMANE

When Jesus arrived at Gethsemane, His whole demeanor changed dramatically. The Bible says He was deeply distressed, troubled, overwhelmed with sorrow. The King James Version states Jesus was “sore amazed” (Mark 14:33), translating a Greek word that meant to be “greatly astonished” or “suddenly alarmed”; it was also a word frequently associated with terror.<sup>xx</sup>

Until this point, Jesus knew all that was to happen and He knew events were under His control. He had no fear of death. It was *His choice* to give His life (John 10:17-18). He was very confident of His coming resurrection. Yet **in the Garden He apparently became aware of something new and evidently unanticipated, and it stunned Him, leading Him to pray, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will”** (Mark 14:36).

Unlike martyrs who heroically die for their cause, Jesus’ death was unique. He was to bear the sins of the world, to be the Sacrifice on whom *all* iniquity would be placed (Isaiah 53:6, 10; John 1:29). He would bear the punishment that was due humanity *in Himself*. Jesus knew that of course, but in the Garden, **He truly saw what it would cost Him to be made sin for us** (II Corinthians 5:21).

The Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards explained that in the Garden Jesus was given a vision of “that furnace of wrath into which He was to be cast.” If the Cross was to be truly His *voluntary choice*, Jesus needed to “have an extraordinary sense how great these sufferings were to be, *before* He endured them. This was given [to Him] in His agony” in Gethsemane.<sup>xxi</sup> The cup He was to drink was God’s judgment and wrath against all sin. It left Him fearful and horrified.

Pope Benedict noted that the *Holy* Jesus would “experience deeply all the horror, filth, and baseness...the vast power of sin and death. All this He must take into Himself so that it can be disarmed and defeated in Him.”<sup>xxii</sup> To take that into Himself also meant there had to come a point of sensing a separation from His Father (His “Abba,” meaning Daddy) in Whom He found solace as He faced the Cross. He had told His disciples that even though they would leave Him, He would *not* be alone; His Father would be with Him (John 16:32).

Perhaps He questioned if His strength was sufficient, if He would indeed be able to bear this. An angel then came to strengthen Him, but “being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood” (Luke 22:43-44). His words, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38 NASB) were addressed to His disciples; He may have also been describing Himself. His final prayer, however, reflected His obedience and victory: “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done” (Matt. 26:42-44).

**Please know that our salvation was never at risk, nor was Jesus’ obedience ever in question. Jesus’ determination to do the Father’s will and His desire to save humanity were paramount. Yet it occurred to Him in the Garden that given the Father’s omnipotence, there might be – *must be* – another means of accomplishing that.** When God was silent, giving no alternatives, He raised the cup of wrath to His lips. Jesus must have continued to feel some normal human apprehension, but He was now resolved and, with presence of mind, prepared to face all that would follow.

***Lord, I am in awe that You willed to spare me hell’s horrors more than You willed to be spared!***

## JESUS' PREPARATION FOR PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews gives us three reasons why the Son of God set aside the prerogatives of His deity to become man. We know Jesus came to give His life for us and destroy the works of the devil. Jesus also came to live out a human life from birth to death so that He might learn obedience from what He suffered and be made perfect through those sufferings (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9). Thirdly, His human life and sufferings prepared Jesus to be a merciful and faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17), a mediator, our representative, bringing the Father to us and bringing us before the Father.

That Jesus had to learn obedience and become perfect is confusing. He was never disobedient, never less than perfect. As such, He is totally “out of our league”! **But to be a faithful High Priest – One to whom we feel comfortable turning – Jesus had to experience life as we do.** Therefore, Jesus shared our flesh and blood. He is fully human, 100%. “So real was His emptying Himself of His life in glory, and so complete was His entrance into all the conditions and likeness of our nature, that He did indeed need to learn obedience.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

At each stage of life, He faced the same temptations we do *and overcame*. Jesus knew the trials of adolescence, the struggles of earning a living, dealing with customers – He worked as a carpenter for more than 15 years! Jesus knew loneliness, hunger, weariness, opposition, and pain. And in Gethsemane, He learned what it is to call out to God “with fervent cries and tears” (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus learned dependence on God and submission to Him in each and every circumstance. Although His inclinations from birth were sinless, that disposition was “tested, developed, and strengthened by trial” all through His life.<sup>xxiv</sup> He learned what it meant to surrender His will to the Father’s will even if He did not fully understand it. While He never sinned, He learned the power of temptation and the devastating effects that sin can have on the daily lives of men and women.

“Made perfect” (Greek: *teleiōsis*) does not mean to move from imperfection to perfection, but rather to be made fully qualified or competent to carry out a designated task. **Jesus’ trials, temptations, and sufferings equipped Him to be a High Priest who sympathizes with our trials and weaknesses and is truly able to help us** (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15f). **“I don’t care who you are or where you are, Jesus knows you and understands you – not just because He is God, but because He became a man.”<sup>xxv</sup> We can always come to Jesus with confidence, without hesitation.**

A High Priest must be able to “**deal gently**” with the people (Hebrews 5:2). The Greek word is *metriopatheō*. Bible commentator William Barclay wrote of that Greek word:

It is a wonderful word. It means the ability to bear with people without getting irritated; it means the ability not to lose one’s temper with people when they are foolish and will not learn...It describes the attitude to others which does not issue in anger at their fault and which does not condone it, but which spends itself in a gentle yet powerful sympathy which by its very patience directs a man back to the right way.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Our wonderful High Priest, made perfect through suffering, is able to deal gently with us!

***Lord Jesus, what a gift it is to be able to turn to You for help and sympathy anytime, anywhere.***

## JESUS' ARREST

When Jesus finished praying, He returned to His sleeping disciples and told them that His betrayer was on his way. Although there would have been a full moon that night – it was during Passover – the soldiers (probably Temple guards) and Temple officials came with torches, perhaps thinking they would need to search for Him, as He surely would try to flee. They also brought weapons, apparently expecting resistance. Judas' kiss to identify Jesus – although the usual way of greeting a rabbi – may have been arranged out of fear that one of His disciples would try to pass himself off as Jesus in order to give Jesus time to escape. How little they knew of Jesus!

Instead, when they arrived at the gate, Jesus went out to meet them. They said they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He announced, "I am He." At that, they fell back in chaos, bumping into one another, tripping, and falling to the ground (John 18:1-6). We can only guess at what they were thinking. Judas may have warned them that Jesus might perform some mighty miracle to destroy or incapacitate them. Or perhaps it was the demeanor of Jesus Himself, His courage and air of authority, so unlike any other "criminal" they had arrested. It may have been His words, "I am," always spoken in power, always expressing His deity (e.g. John 6:35; 8:12; 11:25).

Peter, determined to prove his devotion, attacked Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Peter's foolish deed would have given the soldiers justification in slaughtering the disciples and claiming that Jesus was in fact leading an armed insurrection. No doubt, their swords were drawn at that point, but Jesus took charge of the situation, healed Malchus (Luke 22:50-51) – Jesus' last miracle before His death – and told the soldiers to let His disciples go (John 18:8-9). And they did.

It is significant to remember only a short time before, Jesus had prayed that the terrible cup of suffering be taken from Him. Now Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, adding, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?" (John 18:11). **"We cannot recall to mind too often that it was the victory in the Garden that accounted for this triumph outside the gate. The irresistible dignity and strength here displayed [by Jesus] were gained by watching and prayer."**<sup>xxvii</sup>

On other occasions, when His enemies had tried to kill Him, Jesus simply walked away – His hour had not yet come (e.g. Luke 4:29-30; John 8:59). He reminded the soldiers and Temple officials that He had been teaching in the Temple, and they had not arrested Him. Now, however, Jesus noted that **all these events were the fulfillment of prophecies about Him (Matthew 26:55-56). This was now their hour, "when darkness reigns" (Luke 22:53). In spite of the presence of demons and the actions of the powers of darkness coming against Jesus, God was still in control.**

The soldiers and Temple officials brought Him first to Annas, the former High Priest (John 18:13, 19-23) for a preliminary hearing. Under Jewish Law, defendants need not answer any question that could incriminate them, so Jesus did not answer Annas' questions about His teachings, telling him to ask those who heard Him. Peter and presumably John had followed Jesus to Annas' home (John 18:15-18). Because he knew the High Priest, John went with Jesus into the courtyard, leaving Peter at the door. But unfortunately for Peter, John came back and managed to get Peter inside also. Peter would have been better off to stay outside! Or to have fled with the other nine!

***Father, in the most frightful times, You are still sovereign. Events remain under Your control.***

## JESUS' RELIGIOUS TRIAL

The preliminary hearing at Annas' home may have been to give the chief priests time to gather members of the Sanhedrin together because, until Judas had shown up that night telling them to act *now*, they were not anticipating conducting a trial so quickly. They also needed to secure false witnesses who would support their case. It was now close to midnight, and they needed to act before the Galileans in Jerusalem for the Passover, Jesus' supporters, would learn of His arrest.

Much has been written about the illegalities of Jesus' trial. Jesus was tried, not in the Sanhedrin's meeting hall, which the law demanded, but in High Priest Caiaphas' home, in the same complex as Annas' residence, where members of the Sanhedrin had gathered. No trials were to be conducted at night. The first arguments presented had to be for acquittal. There had to be a delay of a full day between the trial and the vote to convict. Etc. Etc. None of these requirements were met.

Caiaphas had already decided Jesus had to be found guilty and executed (John 11:49-53), but the trial was not going well. The law required two witnesses to independently agree in order to convict, and the witnesses they had secured, although not hesitating to twist the truth, could not agree (Mark 14:55-59). At one point, Caiaphas demanded Jesus answer the charges of the false witnesses, but He kept silent as the law entitled the defendant to do (Mark 14:60-61).

**Then came the decisive moment, the point of no return, the moment of truth. In his frustration, Caiaphas said, "I charge You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God" and Jesus said "Yes" (Matthew 26:63-64). Some translations give Jesus' answer as "You say that I am," sounding ambiguous. It was not. It meant, "You are right in saying I am." Caiaphas' reactions show he knew *exactly* what Jesus was claiming: to be the Son of God, deity incarnate.**

In Israel's history, many claimed to be the Christ, i.e. the Messiah, so that may not have been a huge crime. BUT claiming to be the Son of God was blasphemy, a capital offense. Jesus then went on to make His claim crystal clear: "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62), a reference to Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 110:1. Jesus was indeed confident of His ultimate triumph even as Caiaphas triumphantly declared they needed no more witnesses. Jesus had incriminated Himself and they convicted Him.

Irony! Caiaphas' question mirrored the confession Peter once made of Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Yet as Jesus was affirming His identity, Peter was denying it. That day the High Priest was Jesus' judge, but Jesus warned Caiaphas that one day he would stand *before Him*. Moreover, it was Jesus who would soon be anointed High Priest forever.

Then it was as if all hell broke loose upon Him (Mark 14:65). His accusers, frenzied in their hatred, attacked and hit Him, fulfilling Isaiah 50:6, "I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting." We do not know how long the cruel abuse lasted. Jesus may well have been unrecognizable by the time they were done. Yet as Pope Benedict observed, **"All through history, people look upon the disfigured face of Jesus, and there they recognize the glory of God."**<sup>xxviii</sup> And we can only add our "Amen!"

***Lord Jesus, people are still quick to judge You wrongly. Give me courage to witness for You.***

## JESUS' CIVIL TRIAL

At dawn, the Sanhedrin finally met legally. They drafted charges against Jesus that would hold up under Roman law. Blasphemy – contempt for God, trying to usurp His glory – would not. There were three: misleading the nation, opposing the payment of taxes to Rome, claiming to be a king (Luke 23:2). His *real* crime did come out later: “He claimed to be the Son of God,” alarming Pilate (John 19:7-9) as Romans had myths of gods coming to earth in the guise of men.

Pilate asked his key question of Jesus in scorn and amusement, according to the Greek grammar used. It could read, “*YOU?! You* are the King of the Jews?” Jesus, beaten the night before, did not look like a king. Pilate, accustomed to hearing anyone on trial for their life beg to escape and to say whatever Pilate wanted to hear, assumed Jesus’ answer would be no. Jesus said yes. John’s Gospel is the only one that gives us a more complete record of the longer conversation between Pilate and Jesus in which Jesus clarified that His Kingdom is not of *this* world (John 18:36).

Early in the trial, Pilate asked Jesus, “Am I a Jew?” as if to say, “Don’t assume I have more interest in Your case than I do” (John 18:35), yet his verdict was “not guilty.” **Although he had no qualms ordering anyone’s execution, guilty or not, he wanted to set Jesus free.** Did Jesus’ words and demeanor impress him? Did he want to frustrate the Jews and their scheme? (Matt. 27:18).

Pilate had the authority to free Jesus, but evidently, he was treading a fine line between what he wanted and what the Jewish leaders might do if they did not get their way. He thought he had found the solution in transferring the case to King Herod who ruled Galilee, but that did not work (Luke 23:6-12). He used the custom of freeing one prisoner during Passover to give the crowd their choice between Barabbas and Jesus, assuming they would surely choose Jesus. They did not.

This crowd was *not* the Palm Sunday crowd. They were still unaware of what was happening so early in the morning at Pilate’s palace. This crowd included Temple workers, officials, and members of the Sanhedrin, and maybe a large number of Barabbas’ supporters who, anticipating a prisoner would be set free for Passover, wanted to be there to shout for their choice.

Pilate decided to have Jesus flogged and then set free, an attempt at compromise (Luke 23:16; John 19:1). Many men did not survive the torture of a Roman scourging which ripped a man’s skin to shreds. The soldiers further amused themselves by dressing Jesus as a king, giving Him a crown of thorns, and hitting Him in the face in mock homage (John 19:2-3). When Pilate brought Jesus out in that costume, he simply said “Here is the man!” perhaps thinking the bleeding, beaten Jesus would arouse their pity. Instead, they yelled “Crucify!” (John 19:6). The Jewish leaders then made a veiled threat to report Pilate to Caesar, something they had done once before, and with that, Pilate gave in to their wishes, handing Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified (John 19:12-16).

At one point, **Jesus told Pilate that he would have no authority over Him if it had not been given to him by God (John 19:11).** Indeed, **Jesus submitted to the verdict of the Jewish court and of Rome because He was submitted above all to God, His Father.** Such was His choice: “*I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me*” (John 6:38).

***Lord Jesus, You were condemned in my place that I might go free. Now help me to live for You.***

## WEEK FOUR

## LATE THURSDAY/EARLY FRIDAY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND/OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

#### Open in prayer

**Get-acquainted time** Tell the group if you have ever served on a jury and in a sentence or two, how you felt about deciding someone's fate. Be brief!

#### Group discussion/*Personal reflection* questions

1. Which one of this week's six devotions caught your interest the most? Why that one?
2. Day 1. Jesus used the word "world" well over a dozen times in His prayer in John 17. Sometimes it means God's good creation (verses 5, 24). Most of the time it carries a negative meaning. What is "the world" that Jesus referred to in negative terms? As Christians, what should our relationship be to "the world" according to Jesus in John 17?

*Day 1. Jesus is interceding for you (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). What do you suppose He mentioned in His prayers for you today? (If you give it some serious thought, your guess is probably much closer to the truth than you think!)*

3. Day 2. To read the account of Gethsemane feels like intruding in a very private time in Jesus' life, one that should have been kept solely between Father and Son. Yet the Holy Spirit obviously inspired the Gospel writers to include it. Why do you think He did that? Why is it important for us to know what happened there?

*Day 2. "Thy will be done" is always an appropriate prayer, but whether it is pleasing to God or not depends on the attitude behind it. Are the words prayed in broken surrender, or maybe with passive resignation, or even with bitter and angry resentment, or with loving trust in God's wisdom and goodness? What has been your attitude on the occasions when you have prayed, "Thy will be done"?*

4. Day 2. Would Jesus' time in Gethsemane have been at least a little easier had the disciples stayed awake and been praying? Share with the group a time in your life when you knew you had family and/or friends or maybe even strangers holding you up in prayer. Why is it so important to pray with and for one another?
5. Day 2. Wm. Barclay [*Mark*, page 344: see Sources Used] wrote that when we can call God "Father" or "Abba" as Jesus did in Gethsemane, "everything becomes bearable" because "we will be certain that 'The Father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear.' That is what Jesus knew. That is why He could go on – and it can be so with us."

When you have faced a very trying experience or overwhelming circumstances or suffering, what factors enabled you to "go on"? Share them with the group if you are willing.

6. Day 3. Our High Priest Jesus is able to help us in every test and trial (Hebrews 4:15-16). Why is it that we do not turn to Him for help as often as we could or should?



7. Day 3. Wm. Barclay [*John*, volume 2, page 66] pointed out that Jesus' unique relationship with God "did not give Him the right to do what He liked." It meant "doing always, cost what it may, what God liked." How did that experience help to make Jesus a faithful High Priest?

*Day 3. How comfortable are you in telling Jesus absolutely everything about what is going on in your life, in being totally frank with Him about what you think and feel? Take some time with Him today and resolve to be completely open and honest with Him.*

8. Day 4. If you can, recall a time when you prayed before facing a difficult situation that you knew was coming, and then when actually *in* that situation, you felt peace and strength and/or wisdom that you knew had to have come from God. If you are willing, share your experience with the group.
9. Day 5. Have you ever been falsely accused? Share with the group, if you are willing, how you felt being in that position and how you responded to your accuser(s). What enabled Jesus to face His accusers so calmly although treated so unjustly?
10. Day 5. Re-read the last paragraph of Day 5's devotion. How is it that we see God's glory when we look at Jesus scourged and bleeding, black and blue, face swollen? Or do you?
11. Day 6. In some ways, Jesus' civil trial highlighted choices. Pilate's choice between doing what was right and protecting his career. The crowd's choice between Jesus and Barabbas. The priests' choice when asked by Pilate, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22). How do many of the decisions and choices we make every day – and not merely the "spiritual" ones – also involve choosing between Jesus and ourselves, between His way and our own? Give some examples.
12. Share with the group what you have learned or remembered about Jesus this week.

*Think about what you have learned about Jesus this week. How is it starting to impact your life? In other words, what difference has it made to you?*

**Prayer requests** Share with the group any needs for which you would like the members of your group to pray during the week. Share, too, any answers to prayer for which you want to thank the Lord.

**Close in prayer** Pray silently for a few moments for the person to your right and then the person to your left. After a few moments, close by praying the Lord's Prayer aloud together.

## THE VIA DOLOROSA: THE WAY OF SUFFERING

“Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus” (Jn. 19:16). In submitting to the soldiers, Jesus was primarily submitting to the will of His Father, giving His life up as an offering (Ephesians 5:2). Then, “Carrying His own cross He went out...” (John 19:17).

**“Now the hour on which His imagination had dwelt was come. In weakness and helplessness He had to bear the cross in the sight of thousands who regarded Him with scorn.”**<sup>xxix</sup> Perhaps as He made His way to Calvary with His cross, Jesus thought of Abraham and Isaac climbing the hill where Abraham was to sacrifice his son. Isaac himself carried the wood on which he was to die. Isaac, however, was spared at the last minute and a substitute provided (Genesis 22:1-14).

Jesus, awake all night, scourged, abused by both the priests and the soldiers, could not carry His cross far. The soldiers drafted **Simon of Cyrene** to carry it for him (Mark 15:21). Simon, a bystander, was probably in Jerusalem for the Passover, and now he was humiliated. Even worse, he would now be unclean and unable to celebrate Passover at all. Mark mentioned the names of Simon’s sons in his Gospel, so it seems clear that Simon and his family at some point became believers and were well known in the Church. **The worst day in Simon’s life became his best.**

Somewhere in the city, **Barabbas** was now a free man. He had been the condemned man, guilty, disgraced, facing the agony of a cross. Now he knew liberty. Jesus and Barabbas traded situations. Jesus took on the guilt, the disgrace, and the cross. Christians know that we all stood in the same place as Barabbas – guilty before God, condemned – but because Jesus took our place, we are justified, i.e. declared righteous (Romans 3:21-28).

Along the route, **some women** were weeping. Apparently in Jerusalem, there were pious women who customarily came out to lament those condemned to die. Tradition tells us that wealthy women in Jerusalem provided the wine and myrrh mixture offered to those about to be crucified in order to dull the excruciating pain. Perhaps these were the same women. Jesus told them, **“Do not weep for Me; weep for yourselves and for your children”** (Luke 23:28). Then He alluded to the suffering coming to Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Josephus wrote that when Rome tried to starve the city into surrender, men stole food from the women and even killed children to eat them. Jesus, in His pain, was moved to express His concern for their pain yet to come.

“Do not weep for Me” also reminds us that Jesus does not want our pity. As we read the events of Good Friday and imagine the horrendous suffering, we need to guard against mere sentimentality. **The cross was Jesus’ choice. He desires our faith and obedience, not our pity.** We stand in awe of and in gratitude for His great love for us, for His sacrifice, and for His supreme obedience to the Father. We also see the horror of our sin and the magnitude of God’s grace and mercy.

Jesus proceeds upon His path, and oh, how much is laid upon Him! The guilt of thousands of years, the world’s future—the salvation of millions!...Alas! Whither should we have been going had He not traversed this path for us? Our future state would have ended in unquenchable fire. He knew this. That which He undertook stood every moment, in all its magnitude, present to His soul.<sup>xxx</sup>

***Lord Jesus, You call Your disciples to bear the cross and follow You. Give me courage to do so.***

## THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus was crucified at 9 A.M. (This would be the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour by Hebrew time keeping.) Jesus was on the middle cross, showing that they considered Him the worst or the most dangerous of the three criminals that day.

The statesman Cicero referring to crucifixion stated, "Let it never come near the body of a Roman citizen; nay, not even near his thoughts or eyes or ears."<sup>xxx</sup> People crucified often lived a few days on the cross, enduring pain from the nails driven through nerves and tendons, the scourged back rubbing against the wood, severe muscle cramps, burning thirst, flies, and exhaustion from trying to push oneself up in order to breathe. Death came eventually via cardiac arrest or asphyxiation. Jesus refused the pain-numbing wine and myrrh offered to Him before He was crucified.

The Bible does not dwell on the physical pain because 1) crucifixion's horrors were well known, 2) Jesus' greatest suffering was spiritual, and 3) the cross calls for a response of faith, not pity.

Crucifixions took place outside the city (Hebrews 13:11-12), but on a well-travelled highway so that as many people as possible could witness Roman justice. People passing by could stop, stare, ridicule, pity, or hurry past in horror. In Jesus' case, they hurled insults (Matthew 27:39). Each criminal's crime was printed on a placard hung above him. Jesus' sign said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The chief priests protested this wording, but it was Pilate's attempt to have the last word and irritate them (John 19:21). To their amazement, Jesus will return one day in triumph with this name embroidered on His robe: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16).

The soldier/executioners knew little of Jewish religion or politics and cared even less. This was simply one more execution. As they nailed Jesus to the cross, Jesus prayed: "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing**" (Luke 23:34). Given that most crucified persons cursed them and cursed God, this had to have caught them by surprise, yet they would later join in mocking Jesus (Luke 23:36). **That Jesus addressed God as "Father" while being tortured shows us His strong faith in God's goodness and love in the bleakest of circumstances.**

The soldiers were entitled to Jesus' clothes, which they divided among themselves except for the seamless garment for which they cast lots (John 19:23-24; Psalm 22:18). The robe belonging to the holy Son of God became the unmerited prize of a sinful soldier. Paul would later write, "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). We are not only forgiven, but our filthy clothes are cast aside and we are dressed in Jesus' righteousness through no merit of our own.

The two thieves who were crucified with Jesus were not ordinary robbers but insurrectionists like Barabbas; the same Greek word described all three. They both taunted Jesus at first, but one had a change of heart. "Remember me..." i.e. put in a good word for me! Wishful thinking? No! Jesus encouraged him to have an even greater hope: "**Today you will be with Me in Paradise**" (Luke 23:42-43). This was another sign of Jesus' faith, even in pain on the cross. He *knew* Paradise was something He could offer, starting that very day because of the cross.<sup>xxxii</sup> And how encouraging to Jesus at that moment to have *someone* on that hill recognize His kingship and turn to Him in faith!

***Lord, thank You for exchanging my sin, darkness, and condemnation for Your righteousness!***

## THE SPECTATORS

The ridicule and hatred surrounding Jesus as He hung on the cross was monstrous. The many people travelling past Calvary because of the busy Passover season joined in insulting Him. Besides the four executioners, there may have been other soldiers there to keep the peace who also taunted Him. Surprisingly – or maybe not so surprisingly – there were **chief priests, teachers of the law, and members of the Sanhedrin** there, setting aside the dignity of their offices and leading the crowd in mocking Jesus, not even realizing they were fulfilling Psalm 22:7-8.

The words they hurled at Jesus indicate they had heard His claims. **“Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God...He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him...”** (Matthew 27:40, 43). Jesus heard in their words the temptation that Satan had put before Him: to win the world while avoiding the cross (Matthew 4:8-9). It continued to harass Him throughout His ministry. Although He had the power to come down from the cross and astound them all, the fact that He was the Son of God and completely obedient to the Father kept Him on the cross.

**“He saved others, but He can’t save Himself,”** they shouted in derision (Mark 15:31). Nice that they recognized that Jesus did indeed bring healing, light, and peace to others! They were also correct in their assessment: Jesus could *not* save Himself if He wanted to save us. And He did.

They cried out, **“Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe”** (Mark 15:32). They knew His claim to be the Messiah (the Christ), but they could in no way fathom that God would allow His Messiah to be put on a cross. Seemingly powerless, He certainly did not fit any of their concepts of the coming King who would sit on David’s throne.

Their hatred of Jesus was so strong that had He come down from the cross, they still would not have believed in Him. He had raised Lazarus from the dead in front of many witnesses, and that only increased their hatred (John 11). When a person surrenders to such hatred, they invite the demonic into their lives, and the hatred intensifies beyond reason, fueled by Hell itself. Jesus said their hatred was a fulfillment of prophecy: **“They hated Me without reason”** (John 15:22-25).

**But there were some there who loved Him with all their hearts:** Jesus’ mother and the many women who had followed Him from Galilee including Mary Magdalene and Salome. And John, the only disciple to follow Jesus through His trials and to stand beneath His cross. Seeing her dying Son, Mary must have remembered the words of the angel Gabriel: **“The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David”** (Luke 1:32). *So how could it have come to this?* Jesus saw His mother there and His beloved disciple nearby and entrusted her to John’s care. Mary had other sons, but they did not believe in Jesus (John 7:5), and so John would take her into his home (John 19:26-27). Jesus’ care for Mary in the midst of His pain and great sacrificial work assures us that even today,

However much Jesus may have to think of and attend to, He never loses sight of His children for a moment. However great and boundless may be the objects of His supervision and vigilance in His government, yet there will never be a moment when the eye of His love will not rest upon every individual whom the Father has given Him.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

***Lord, the women and John proved their love for You; may I also show You such loving devotion.***

## THE HOURS OF DARKNESS

At noon (the sixth hour), the skies went dark as if it were night, and the darkness lasted three hours, calling to mind the three days of darkness (Exodus 10:21-23) that preceded the first Passover in Egypt when the blood of the lambs saved the firstborn sons of Israel from death. Now the Lamb of God was shedding His blood and giving His life to bring deliverance to humanity.

Darkness was also a sign of God's judgment (e.g. Isaiah 13:9-11). **During these hours, Jesus was silent, as He bore our sins, emptied the cup the Father had given Him, experienced sin's curse, and resisted Satan's assaults.** After Jesus' temptation in the desert, the devil "left Him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). These hours of darkness provided Satan with that opportune time to tempt Jesus to doubt and despair as He was surrounded by images of hell, sin, and death.

One can almost hear Satan whisper, "Look around You! Your suffering is for nothing. People will always reject You and choose my way over Yours." In these dark hours, Jesus felt deprived of God's affection and presence as He hung there experiencing our guilt and damnation. "In my alarm I said, 'I am cut off from Your sight!'" (Psalm 31:22). Did Satan suggest that that might be His new reality? To be cut off forever from His Father? Psalm 69 is a passion psalm pointing to Jesus. Did Jesus pray, "Do not let...the pit close its mouth over me" (verse 15) as Satan tried to get Him to believe that His death would be His end and that there would be no resurrection?

**Nearing the end of these three hours, Jesus suddenly broke His silence with a loud cry: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** (Mark 15:34). Some commentators move quickly past His cry to point out He was quoting Psalm 22, which ends on a victorious note. While that is true, the fact is that His cry did express emotional anguish and His total identification with the sinners He had come to save. Evidently, "such distress overpowered Him, such death-like terror appalled Him, and such infernal temptations roared around Him, that a feeling came over Him as if He were exiled from fellowship with God."<sup>xxxiv</sup> How He longed to hear again the words, "You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). His cry

may be taken as the index of what was going on in His mind during the preceding hours; and it is a cry out of the lowest depths of despair...Even in Christ's own mind the uppermost thought, when He uttered this cry, was one of astonishment. In Gethsemane, "He was sore amazed." And this is obviously the tone of this utterance also.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Ironically, as Jesus experienced forsakenness and God stood as His Judge, God had never been more pleased with His Son who had fully and willingly obeyed His will and submitted to the Cross and all it involved. Jesus called out to "My God" – the relationship was still intact. **"Feeling forsaken of God, He rushed into the arms of God."**<sup>xxxvi</sup> **Whatever else Jesus was feeling, He knew God keeps His Word**, including the promise: "You will not abandon me to the grave nor will You let Your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10). "The victor is the man who refuses to believe that God has forgotten him even when every fiber of his being feels that he is forsaken....The victor is the man who has been beaten to the depths and still holds on to God, and that is what Jesus did."<sup>xxxvii</sup> Then after six hours on the cross, three in total darkness, the sun came out again.

***Lord Jesus, I stand in awe before Your Cross. I have no words to express my love and gratitude.***

## THE NEXT FEW MINUTES

At the end of the three hours of darkness, Jesus, “knowing that all was now completed,” spoke again: **“I am thirsty”** (John 19:28). We remember that in Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man in Hades longed for water (Luke 16:23-24). Thus, in more ways than we can comprehend, Jesus experienced the torments of damnation. Now Jesus needed to moisten His tongue and lips to enable Him to shout out His declaration of triumph: **“It is finished!”** (John 19:30). It was similar to a general’s shout to the army, “We have victory!” Or an artist putting the last touches on a masterpiece and saying, “It’s done!” Or a homeowner paying off a mortgage and announcing, “Paid in full!” What Jesus had set out to do had been accomplished.

Then Jesus prayed, **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit”** (Luke 23:46), aware once more of His Father’s presence and care. Then “He bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30).

Throughout His suffering, Jesus had the ability to choose to live or die...Now He proved His determination to complete His mission of salvation, for He held on to life until all our sins were paid for and the penalty had been paid in full. We will never know how desperately Christ yearned for release from His spiritual suffering before full payment was made. But at last the moment came. And only then Jesus “gave up His spirit.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

At that moment, the thick, heavy veil in the Temple, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). Only one person – the high priest – was allowed to go behind the veil into the Holiest Place and only once a year. It was torn to show that **now all might have access to God**. Hebrews 10:19-22 speaks of the significance of this miracle. It may have also opened the minds of some priests to the possibility that Jesus was indeed the Messiah because in the early days of the Church, many priests came to faith in Jesus (Acts 6:7).

The centurion on duty had seen a lot of death and could clearly see there was something different about Jesus’ demeanor. Then there was an earthquake at the moment of His death. That and the eerie darkness prompted the centurion to declare, **“Surely He was the Son of God!”** (Matthew 27:51, 54). Tradition gives his name as Longinus and says he became a Christian and later, the bishop of Cappadocia (in present day Turkey).

Other spectators were similarly affected. “They beat their breasts”—an expression of grief and woe (Luke 23:48). Quite a change of heart! They were not yet believers, but maybe what they witnessed led them, after hearing Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, to turn to Jesus (Acts 2:36-38).

It may have been the earthquake that day that jarred open many tombs – basically caves dug into rock, with their openings sealed with stones rolled into place along a groove (Matthew 27:52-53). This was surely a sign that Jesus had conquered death. Since Jesus was the “firstborn from among the dead” (Colossians 1:18), the bodies of the dead within them would not have come to life until Easter after Jesus was raised. The Lutheran Study Bible states, **“Their resurrection demonstrated the purpose of Christ’s death: to bring eternal life to those doomed to die.”**<sup>xxxix</sup> One more sign to assure us of Jesus’ promise: “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).

***Lord Jesus, because of Your death, I can enter God’s presence! Because of You, I will live forever!***

## THE BURIAL

The Jewish Sabbath began at sundown, and so the priests were eager to have the bodies removed from the crosses before evening. To hasten their death, the soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus, preventing them from pushing themselves upward in order to breathe. Jesus was already dead so His legs were not broken, but to make certain He was dead, a soldier pierced His side with his spear, fulfilling additional prophecies (John 19:31-37).

**Joseph of Arimathea**, a member of the Sanhedrin, boldly asked Pilate for Jesus' body. Given the disciples were in hiding, had he not done so, Jesus' body would have been thrown into a common grave. Joseph was wealthy with considerable influence. He was a *secret* disciple of Jesus, fearing the response of his fellow leaders had they found out. In coming forth to give Jesus a decent burial, however, he made his sympathies known. **What courage to declare oneself a supporter of Jesus now that He hung dead on the cross like a criminal!**

**Nicodemus**, another member of the Sanhedrin, accompanied Joseph. Nicodemus had visited Jesus early in His ministry and had defended Him at least once before (John 7:50-51). Jesus had told Nicodemus (John 3:14) that He would be "lifted up" (a euphemism for crucifixion). That conversation must have come to Nicodemus' mind on Good Friday.

Apparently, no one had informed Joseph and Nicodemus of the late night trial of Jesus at the home of Caiaphas the night before or perhaps they chose not to attend. Maybe they had attended but did not have the courage to protest the verdict brought against Jesus. That would seem unlikely, given their show of courage *after* Jesus' death. Now they risked ostracism.

**Obviously, they made the decision to prepare Jesus' body for burial earlier that day.** As soon as Jesus died, Joseph immediately went to Pilate. Nicodemus already had all the linen and the spices they needed. He had to have purchased them earlier while the shops were still open before the Sabbath began. The large amount of spices he brought (75 pounds) shows they intended to give Jesus a royal burial. They were not deterred even though their deed would make them unclean.

The tomb belonged to Joseph and his family (Matthew 27:60; Isaiah 53:9). Although he was from the town of Arimathea, it was common for wealthy Jews to have a tomb in Jerusalem because Jews desired a Jerusalem gravesite. The tombs of the wealthy were caves with shelves for the bodies of the deceased family members. As of yet, Joseph's tomb was empty.

The women who had been at the cross followed them and knew where the tomb was located. The Jewish leaders also knew in that they requested guards be posted there to prevent His body from being stolen and His disciples claiming He was resurrected. **How very strange that Jesus' enemies remembered that Jesus said He would rise in three days (Matthew 27:62-66), while Jesus' own followers evidently totally forgot His promise!**

Meanwhile as the Apostles' Creed affirms, Jesus "descended into Hell" (1 Peter 3:18-22) – not to continue His suffering but to proclaim His total victory over sin, death, the devil, and Hell itself!

***Father, give me the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus to stand up for Jesus in the darkest night.***

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND/OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

## Open in prayer

**Get-acquainted time** Share with the group in a sentence or two a depiction of the crucifixion (a painting, a sculpture, a movie, or a written description) that left you feeling stunned or in awe or in some way deeply affected. (If nothing comes to mind, that's OKAY.) Be brief.

**Group discussion/Personal reflection questions**

1. Which one of the week's six devotions caught your interest the most? Why that one?
2. Day 1. Have you ever, like Simon of Cyrene, had a horrible day, a day that in retrospect turned out to be one of your best? Tell the group about it.
3. Day 1. Perhaps most of us wish we could have been in Jerusalem on Good Friday to offer Jesus some help, some kindness, as He made His way to the Cross. Jesus said, however, that whatever good thing we do "for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40).  
If we truly do believe that, how might our lives reflect that belief?

*Day 1. Read Matthew 25:40. If you truly believed Jesus' words, what is one thing you would have done differently this past week?*

4. Day 2. The commentary in *The Scofield Study Bible* [page 1383: see Sources Used] observes that one thief crucified that day was saved, therefore no one need despair. But *only one thief* was saved, therefore no one should presume.  
What does that mean? Do you agree or not?
5. Day 2. What helps you to hold onto your belief that God is loving and good when events and circumstances in your life and/or in the world seem to argue against His love and goodness?
6. Day 3. In our nation (as this is being written in November 2021), there is much divisiveness and even hatred of people whose political views disagree with one's own. Hatred always opens the door to the demonic.  
What can we do to guard against such reactions in our own hearts?  
What can we do to help lessen the hostile attitudes in our nation?

*Day 3. What does it mean to you that Jesus never loses sight of you, that His loving eyes are on you every moment? Tell Him!*

7. Day 4. Read Psalm 22. How many prophecies pointing to Good Friday can your group find? How do you think the Jewish leaders failed to see in the Cross the fulfillment of prophecy? (II Corinthians 3:13-16 might give you a hint.)



8. Day 4. Seeing all that happened on Calvary, one can well ask how *anything* good could come out of the horrendous events of that day. But we know that the salvation of all who believe in Jesus came out of that day's events – as dark and evil as they must have seemed. What does this tell us about God's sovereignty?  
What does this tell us about what our own attitude should be in very dark times?
9. Day 5. On Good Friday, Jesus needed help carrying His cross. And on the cross, He expressed His thirst, depending on the soldiers to meet His need. What does it say to us that Jesus could humbly ask for and gratefully receive help in His own hour of need?
10. Day 5. Jesus said, "It is finished!" What all did "it" include?  
For example, Jesus won access to God's presence for us (shown by the torn Temple veil).
11. Day 6. Why do you suppose that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus made their allegiance to Jesus known *after* His death, when His death seemed to prove that the priests were right and that He was not the one who He claimed to be?
12. Share with the group what you have learned or remembered about Jesus this week.

*Think about what you have learned about Jesus this week. How is it starting to impact your life? In other words, what difference has it made to you?*

**Prayer requests** Share with the group any needs for which you would like the members of your group to pray during the week. Share, too, any answers to prayer for which you want to thank the Lord.

**Close in prayer** Read aloud (or sing!) the words of the hymn *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded* as your closing prayer.

"O sacred Head, now wounded With grief and shame weighed down;  
Now scornfully surrounded With thorns Thine only crown.  
How pale Thou art with anguish, With sore abuse and scorn;  
How does that visage languish, Which once was bright as morn!

"What Thou, my Lord, have suffered Was all for sinners' gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression, But Thine the deadly pain.  
Lo, here I fall my Savior; 'Tis I deserve Thy place.  
Look on me with Thy favor; Assist me with Thy grace.

"What language shall I borrow To thank Thee, dearest Friend,  
For this, Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever; And should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never, Outlive my love to Thee."

Text: Paul Gerhardt, based on a Medieval Latin poem ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux.  
Translated from the German by James W. Alexander. In common domain.

## THE SON OF GOD

The Bible does not describe the actual physical resurrection of Jesus. No one saw it! We are simply told that Jesus rose from the dead very early on Sunday (Mark 16:9), that God raised Him from the dead because “it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him” (Acts 2:24). The earth shook, and then an angel whose “appearance was like lightning” – and who was seen by the terrified soldiers on guard – rolled away the stone that had sealed the tomb to reveal that the tomb was now empty (Matthew 28:2-4).

Piecing together the accounts from all four Gospels, we see that Mary Magdalene and two other women went to the tomb before sunrise (Mark 16:1; John 20:1). Seeing the open tomb, Mary left to tell Peter and John (John 20:2). The other women evidently stayed and saw an angel who said Jesus had risen and who told them to tell Jesus’ disciples (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 24:2-7). They left in haste. Mary returned with Peter and John who both entered the tomb and saw the grave clothes but no angel. Peter and John left, but Mary remained at the tomb in tears. Mary was the first to see, touch, and speak with the Risen Christ (John 20:14-17). The other women chose at first not to tell anyone what they saw and heard due to their bewilderment and fear (Mark 16:8), but then, while they were still on the road, Jesus appeared to them (Matthew 28:8-10).

At some point early in the day, Jesus appeared to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34). Later – we do not know when – He also appeared to His half-brother, James (I Corinthians 15:7). Sunday afternoon, Jesus joined the two disciples as they walked to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). They then returned to Jerusalem and to the other disciples who now knew: “**The Lord is risen indeed!**” (Luke 24:34 King James Version). That evening Jesus Himself joined them (Luke 24:36-49).

Jesus “was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). In other words, **the Resurrection validated every claim Jesus had ever made about Himself.** Teaching in the Temple, Jesus had explained that when a person looks at Him, that person sees the One who sent Him (John 12:45). The night before His death, He assured the disciples, “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:8-11). On another occasion, Jesus had said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). In what sense is God One yet also Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? One in essence and identical in divine nature, the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct in their Personhood. While we cannot solve the mystery of the Trinity, we do know that we come face to face with God in Jesus. Do we wonder what God is really like, how He regards us? Look at Jesus!

**The Resurrection also validated everything that Jesus taught and promised!** His words are the very words of God! As God’s Son, He has the authority and the power to fulfill every promise He has made! His resurrection from the dead assures us that *all His promises of eternal life are true!*

And because Jesus is alive forevermore, we can know Him not only intellectually through a study of His words and deeds; we can also know Jesus personally and intimately. We speak with Him, we count on Him, we seek His guidance, and we sense His presence with us – and even when we do not, we know He *is* indeed with us because that is His promise! As has often been said, Jesus is not merely a Teacher to study but a living Person to encounter and with whom to engage.

***Lord Jesus, what an incredible privilege and blessing it is to know You!***

## MARY MAGDALENE AND THE WOMEN

The women who came to the tomb Sunday morning did not come with any expectation that Jesus might be alive. They had come with spices to anoint a *dead body*. Mary Magdalene, seeing the empty tomb, assumed someone had taken the body. Like the twelve disciples, they had not understood what Jesus had told them all along: that He would rise from the dead on the third day (e.g. Luke 9:22; 18:33). Had they paid attention to His words and *believed* them, all the disciples and the women might have gathered at the tomb to await the promised resurrection!

Nevertheless, these same women who had courageously stood by Jesus on Calvary, watching Him die, were still loyal to Him. Mary Magdalene, thinking a gardener (who was actually Jesus!) had carried Jesus' body away, even volunteered to go and get the body, giving no thought as to how she would do that or where she would take Him! Speaking to the angels, Mary still referred to Jesus as "My Lord" (John 20:13-15). **These women still loved Jesus! No doubt, their undying love and devotion prompted the Lord to show Himself first to them.**

We do not know why Mary did not recognize Jesus at first. Obviously, she was not expecting to meet Him alive! She also was more focused on the tomb than the one she assumed to be the gardener. Only when Jesus spoke her name are we told that "She turned *toward* Him," recognized Him, and apparently threw her arms around Him and would not let go because Jesus then told her, "Stop clinging to Me" as He and she both had important work to do (John 20:17 NASB)!

Later when Jesus met the women on the road, He greeted them with the casual salutation one would use in greeting a friend in the market or at the city gates (Matthew 28:9). **"He had brought into the new resurrection life all the old tenderness and natural human sympathies."**<sup>x1</sup> In the Resurrection accounts, we see a very human Jesus. He asked Mary why she was crying and then tenderly spoke her name (John 20:15-16). He walked along a road with two disciples heading to Emmaus and later sat down at the table with them (Luke 24). He joined His disciples for dinner on Easter evening (Luke 24:40-43). Jesus even cooked breakfast for His disciples, showing them that personal close fellowship with Him would continue even after the Resurrection (John 21).

**At the same time, Jesus' followers perceived a difference about Him, and so the women knelt down, grasping His feet, and worshipped Him** (Matthew 28:9). His followers, who had always respected Him, now also *worshipped* Him (Matthew 28:17). The Risen Lord exercises all authority, and that must have been obvious in His demeanor (Matthew 28:18). Thomas, on seeing Jesus, acknowledged Him to be God, and Jesus accepted the title (John 20:28). When John later saw a vision of Jesus, he was so overcome by Jesus' majesty, he passed out (Revelation 1:17)

Our experience of Jesus likewise reflects both a familiarity with Him – knowing we can come to Him at any time with anything that concerns us and speak freely to Him – and reverence, never forgetting that He is Lord. Jesus calls those who belong to Him His friends and His brothers and sisters (John 15:13-15; 20:17). He knows each one of us by name and wants us to be with Him forever (John 10:3, 14; 17:24). At the same time, we balance that gracious gift of familiarity with worship, submission, awe, honor, and obedience. Because Jesus *is* fully man and fully God!

***Jesus, may I always love You as my best Friend and worship and obey You as my Lord and God.***

## PETER AND JAMES

When we last left Peter, he was in the courtyard of the High Priest, denying that he knew Jesus. At his third denial, “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter,” and then Peter “went outside and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:56-62). Evidently, the disciple John, who had a home in Jerusalem, took him in after his colossal failure because Mary Magdalene found him with John on Sunday morning.

Peter and John both entered the empty tomb and saw the grave clothes. Three different Greek words, however, were used for “saw” in John 20. Mary *saw* the stone was gone, the past tense of see. Peter *saw* in that he gave the linens a careful, critical look. John “*saw and believed*” (John 20:8), meaning he comprehended. Something about the grave clothes had caught their attention. If someone had moved the body, he would have kept it in the linens. Instead, it was “exactly as if the body of Jesus had evaporated out of them and left them lying empty there” like a cocoon.<sup>xii</sup>

Meanwhile, Peter must have tortured himself, replaying his words “I do not know Him” again and again in his mind. And then Jesus appeared to Peter. We do not know when on Sunday or where except to know it was after He appeared to the women and before He appeared to any of the other disciples (I Corinthians 15:5). The Gospels do not give us an account of that meeting. After he saw Jesus, Peter told the other disciples who were then convinced Jesus was alive (Luke 24:34).

**The tender care that Jesus extended to His *individual* followers is touching.** The Resurrection had just taken place! Death was defeated! Jesus had forever changed the human situation! Yet, on that momentous day, Jesus took time to meet Mary in her extreme grief and speak her name. Jesus met Peter in his deep remorse and probably held him in His strong arms as Peter sobbed both in deep repentance and in great joy at seeing Jesus alive. Jesus spoke the words of forgiveness and love that Peter needed to hear. Later, in the presence of the other disciples, Jesus reinstated Peter in his role as the shepherd of His sheep (John 21). The following Sunday, Jesus made a special visit to the disciples in order to show Himself to one of them, to Thomas, to put his doubts to rest and convince him that He was truly alive (John 20:24-29).

Jesus also appeared at some point to His half-brother James (I Corinthians 15:7). During Jesus’ ministry, His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). These men would have been in Jerusalem during the Passover when Jesus was crucified, and some biblical scholars think James may have been among those watching the events on Calvary from a distance (Luke 23:49). Other than Jesus’ convincing James of who He truly is, we have no way of reconstructing their conversation that day.

James must have told the other brothers because on Pentecost, Jesus’ brothers were there with all of the other disciples, awaiting the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; 21:17-19). Paul called him one of the pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9).

**Jesus’ sensitivity to *each* of His own brings us reassurance as well.** In our grief, Jesus comes to us with His comfort and His promises. When we have failed Him, Jesus seeks us out and restores us to fellowship with Himself. When we struggle with doubts and unbelief, if we will listen, Jesus will open our minds to God’s Word and help us to see the truth. Jesus does care about *you and me!*

***Lord, thank You for the sensitive, personal, and kindhearted way in which You deal with me.***

## CLEOPAS AND HIS FRIEND

The disciples had heard the women say that Jesus was alive, but they did not believe them (Luke 24:11). Their Jewish courts did not accept the testimony of women and neither did they. When Paul wrote of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus (I Corinthians 15), he ignored His appearances to the women! Yet the Lord chose women to be the first ones to proclaim His resurrection.

Easter afternoon, two followers of Jesus left Jerusalem for Emmaus, a 7-mile walk. They were talking and discussing all that had happened in the last few days and the stories they had heard from the women who claimed to have seen Jesus. The Greek verbs (Luke 24:14-15) indicate that they were throwing ideas back and forth, trying to figure things out. What they needed was a new way of understanding Scripture, and this is what Jesus would give them that afternoon.

As they walked, Jesus joined them and asked them what they were discussing. Not recognizing Jesus, Cleopas responded with shock that this stranger could be clueless as to all the things that had happened in Jerusalem that weekend. The Stranger asked, "What things?" Commentator G. Campbell Morgan exclaimed, "If anyone can read this story and not believe that there is even in that resurrection life the manifestations of the humor of God, I do not understand that person. **There is a tender and beautiful playfulness in the way that Jesus dealt with these men**"<sup>xlii</sup> – even pretending that He was going farther when the two had reached their destination.

They told Jesus of Friday's events. They still considered Jesus a powerful prophet in spite of His death. Yet at the same time, they were confused and disappointed. "We *had hoped* that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel" – *past tense* (Luke 24:21). Hope was now gone.

The angels had mildly rebuked the women for not believing Jesus when He had spoken so often of His coming death and resurrection: "He has risen, *just as He said*" (Matthew 28:6). The angel in Luke 24:6-8 was more to the point: "*Remember how He told you...*" Then the angel quoted Jesus' own words, and the women finally remembered. Jesus was sterner in His rebuke of these two men: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25). Radio preacher J. Vernon McGee advises us, "**It is well to note the Lord's attitude toward the Bible...Christ says a man is a *fool* not to believe it.**"<sup>xliii</sup>

Jesus did not show them His nail-scarred hands as He later did with the disciples (Luke 24:40). Instead, He directed them back to God's Word, to the Scriptures, explaining to them "what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Later that night, Jesus did the same with all the disciples, opening their minds to understand the Scriptures and how He had fulfilled all that was written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44-45). Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe explains, "**The key to understanding the Bible is to see Jesus Christ on every page.**"<sup>xliv</sup>

We have not seen the Risen Christ, but we have the biblical witness. Believe it! Like the disciples, however, we need to be enlightened to understand it. Some things can only be spiritually discerned (I Corinthians 2:13-16). How blessed we are to have the Holy Spirit within us to guide us and to open our minds to what the Bible teaches!

***Father, how grateful I am for Your Word! Holy Spirit, grant me insight into the truth of Scripture.***

## THE DISCIPLES AND MORE THAN 500 BELIEVERS

Cleopas and his friend invited Jesus to stay with them, and as Jesus broke the bread at dinner, they recognized Him. Then Jesus disappeared. Immediately they returned to Jerusalem to tell the others. That night, Jesus appeared to the gathered disciples. Their first thought was that they were seeing a ghost, so Jesus invited them to touch Him and to see that He had “flesh and bones.” As they were still unconvinced due to their “joy and amazement,” Jesus ate some fish in their presence and then “opened their minds” to understand the Scriptures about Him (Luke 24:30-45).

In addition to His appearances on Easter Sunday, Jesus met with His followers on a hill in Galilee. Matthew only mentions the eleven disciples, stating that those gathered worshipped Him “but some doubted” (28:16-17). By this time, the eleven disciples no longer had any doubts, so there were obviously many more disciples than the eleven present on that day who had not yet seen Jesus alive after His resurrection. Scholars assume this was the gathering when there were more than 500 disciples present (I Corinthians 15:6), representing the many followers of Jesus in Galilee. The word “doubt” as used here does not mean unbelief but that “they felt some hesitation.”<sup>xlv</sup> They were clearly overwhelmed and not sure how to digest this new dimension of life.

There were other appearances Jesus made of which we have no record. We read in Acts 1:3 that Jesus made appearances for 40 days after Easter before He ascended to heaven. By that time, His followers were thoroughly convinced. **The dramatic change in the lives of those who saw Jesus alive testifies to the reality of their experience. His disciples went from deep grief to great joy and even more significantly, on Pentecost (Acts 2), from debilitating fear to putting their lives on the line for their witness.** “Indeed, the apostolic preaching with all its boldness and passion would be unthinkable unless the witnesses had experienced a real encounter...”<sup>xlvi</sup> It was as Jesus had told them the night before His death: “Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and *no one will take away your joy*” (John 16:22).

Meanwhile, **“We live by faith, not by sight”** (II Corinthians 5:7). We too encounter the Risen Jesus but in a different way. Today, we are His disciples, and Jesus comes to us too. Indeed, He lives with us and within us (John 14:20)! We do not see Him, but we know Him. We cannot physically touch Him, but we sense His presence. We hear Him speak to us. And we love Him (I Peter 1:8).

In His time with His disciples after His resurrection, Jesus commissioned them *and us* – all of His followers for all time: **“As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you”** (John 20:21). Jesus came as a servant, so He calls us to serve as well. Jesus came to do the Father’s will, so He calls us to set aside our wills and to do God’s will as well. Jesus came to give His life for us, and now it is up to us to tell everyone of His sacrifice and to extend to them God’s offer of forgiveness and eternal life!

The Risen Christ has assured us that He has all authority (Matthew 28:18-20). No matter what is going on in the world or in our lives, He is in control. The mission He has given His Church will succeed because He has granted us the presence and power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49)! **Jesus’ words, “Surely I am with you always...” are not a promise but a statement of fact!** Wherever He sends us and whatever He asks us to do, we can count on His presence with us every moment.

***Lord, what a privilege to be Your disciple! May I always be Your faithful servant and witness.***

## THE ATONEMENT

After Easter, over time and through the Holy Spirit's guidance, Jesus' followers re-visited the Scriptures and realized the profound meaning of the Cross. Jesus Himself had prompted this fresh study on Easter evening, opening their minds to God's Word (Luke 24:46).

**Ever since the first sin, the restoration of sinful humanity's relationship with the one holy God has been our greatest need. Atonement refers to restoring fellowship between God and humanity.** Israel's sacrificial system provided a covering for sin and always involved an animal's blood. The blood of animals, however, could never provide a permanent solution. It could cover sin but could neither truly cleanse people from sin nor free them from guilt (Hebrews 10).

Atonement is a difficult concept. We fail to see the serious nature of our sin. Failing to see that, we cannot understand why the Bible speaks of the wrath of God or of the need for redemption and sacrifice. Yet, if we as parents learn that someone has hurt our children, we respond with anger and want justice done. If we see our children harming themselves, we are distressed and act to stop the abuse. Likewise, God must deal with sin, with evil, with the need for justice. The problem is complicated because we are the sinners, and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Yet we can hardly call God cruel for demanding atonement when He provided it Himself.

**When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, "God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood – to be received by faith" (Romans 3:25).**

In the cross of Jesus, what animal sacrifices had sought in vain to achieve actually occurred: atonement was made for the world. The "Lamb of God" took upon Himself the sins of the world and wiped them away. God's relationship to the world, formerly distorted by sin, was now renewed. Reconciliation had been accomplished.<sup>xlvii</sup>

The Bible shows us many facets of Christ's work on the cross. Jesus Himself said He came to give His life as a ransom (Mark 10:45). Redemption is another aspect, also giving a picture of a payment made to secure our freedom from sin and death – a payment made not with silver or gold, but "with the precious blood of Christ" (I Peter 1:18-19). Even creation itself is impacted by His redemptive work (Romans 8:19-21). Moreover, His blood has fully cleansed us (I John 1:7). But Jesus did *not* die in order to appease God! Jesus "was neither persuading God to love us nor overcoming reluctance in the heart of God to save us. He was cooperating with the work of God," revealing God's love<sup>xlviii</sup> – a work planned by Father and Son before creation!

In a way that we cannot comprehend, Jesus took our sins into Himself and thereby accepted our condemnation (II Corinthians 5:21). He was our "Substitute." **When Jesus cried out, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He was expressing "the fact that the pains and penalties of human sin were His. That is as far as we can see into the Atonement. That is the heart of it, and the center of it, and the soul of it, and the marvel of it, and the mystery of it!"<sup>xlix</sup>** As Pastor Warren Wiersbe noted, "It will take eternity to reveal all that happened when Jesus Christ died on the cross."<sup>1</sup> We simply accept in faith and gratitude the benefits the Lord Jesus won for us.

***Lord God, the Atonement is indeed an awesome mystery to us! Thank You for saving us!***

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND/OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

## Open in prayer

**Get-acquainted time** In one or two sentences, tell the group about something good that has happened in your life during these weeks of Lent. Be brief.

**Group discussion/Personal reflection questions**

1. Which one of this week's six devotions caught your interest the most? Why that one?
2. Day 1. In spite of the variations in the way the Gospel writers tell of the events of Easter, two points never vary: 1) the tomb was empty, and 2) many people actually saw, talked with, and touched the Risen Jesus.  
What else convinces you of the reality of Jesus' resurrection?  
Or is the testimony of Scripture sufficient?
3. Day 1. Read I Corinthians 15:12-19. The Apostle Paul stated, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (verse 19).  
What did he mean? Why would we be pitied?
4. Day 1. What does it mean to you that the character of God the Father is exactly like that of Jesus, His Son?

*Day 1. Do you feel you are sufficiently availing yourself of the amazing privilege of engaging with Jesus and getting to know Him intimately?*

5. Day 2. Why do you suppose the women and the disciples never truly heard Jesus when He had said on numerous occasions that the Son of Man (His title for Himself) would rise again on the third day (e.g. Luke 18:31-33)?
6. Day 2. How easy do you find it to keep a balance between familiarity with Jesus and reverence for Him? Do you lean more to one posture or the other?
7. Day 3. After Peter and John entered the tomb, Peter left puzzled while we are told that John "saw and believed" (John 20:8). Why do you think it is easier for some people to grasp and accept spiritual truth than for others?

*Day 3. Is it easy or difficult for you to believe that Jesus cares for you – individually, personally – as He cared about Mary, Peter, Thomas, and the others to whom He appeared? Think of the times when you have been a recipient of His personal care.*

8. Day 4. Which of the stories of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection is your favorite? Share with the group why you like that one the best.
9. Day 4. Why do you think that Jesus directed Cleopas and his friend back to Scripture instead of simply showing them His nail-scarred hands?



10. Day 5. How does the dramatic change in the lives of the disciples after Easter also help prove the truth of the Resurrection?

*Day 5. Have you accepted the fact that you too are commissioned by Jesus and that He is sending you as the Father had sent Him? Can you point to a way in which you are carrying out that commission in your life? Talk to Jesus about it.*

11. Day 6. Many of the titles of Jesus point to His work on the Cross: Lamb of God, Redeemer, Savior, and Suffering Servant. Discuss the meaning, as you understand it, of each of those titles.

Which one of those titles do you find most meaningful for you personally?

12. Share with the group what you have learned or remembered about Jesus this week.

*Think about what you have learned about Jesus this week. How is it starting to impact your life? In other words, what difference has it made to you?*

**Prayer requests** Share with the group any needs for which you would like the members of your group to pray during the week. Share, too, any answers to prayer for which you want to thank the Lord.

**Since this is the last meeting of your group...** discuss whether you want to keep in touch with each other and how you will attempt to do that, e.g. Zoom, emails, periodic get-togethers. Decide on who will initiate contact.

If there is a desire to do so, you could continue as a group, meeting every week or every other week or at an agreed upon schedule. There are many resources available for groups to use for discussions and activities as well as group Bible studies.

If your group wants to meet for a reunion after Easter or later in the spring, make the needed decisions regarding when and where and choose a contact person to make arrangements.

**Close in prayer** Since this is your last session together, you might include a time of thanking God for insights you may have gained and also for your fellow group members. And of course, thank Jesus for all He did for us on the Cross and for His resurrection victory!

## APPENDIX A

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGES REGARDING THE ATONEMENT

**Isaiah 53:5-6, 10** “But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all....Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer...”

**Matthew 1:21** The angel Gabriel to Joseph in a dream, “You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

**Mark 10:45** Jesus’ words to His disciples, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

**John 1:29** John the Baptist: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

**Romans 3:25** “God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood.”

**Romans 4:25** “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

**Romans 5:9** “Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through Him!”

**Ephesians 1:7** “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins...”

**Ephesians 5:2** “...Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

**I Timothy 2:5-6** “...the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people.”

**Hebrews 9:22** “...without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.”

**I Peter 1:18-19** “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ...”

**I Peter 2:24** “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness...”

**I John 1:7** “...the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” (NASB)

**Revelation 1:5-6** “To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood...to Him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.”

**Revelation 5:9** Those surrounding God’s throne sing to the Lamb: “...with Your blood You purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

**Revelation 7:14** Regarding the saints: “...they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Through the centuries of Church history, Christians have read the biblical accounts of Holy Week and felt justified in condemning the Jews for the crucifixion of Christ. Atrocities have been committed against the Jews due in part to the blame placed upon them for Jesus' death. When Pilate washed his hands in front of the crowd, declaring his innocence in Jesus' execution, the people cried out, "His blood is on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). Their words became a rationalization for antisemitism.

**Jesus had many followers during His ministry who were almost all Jewish!** The "Jews" so often referred to as His enemies were the priests and elders in positions of authority. Jesus was popular in Galilee, and although at one point some of those people did stop following Him (John 6:66), many more still considered Him the Messiah. They were the ones shouting "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday. As Jesus taught in the Temple during His last week, "all the people hung on His words" (Luke 19:48). In Jerusalem, "many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith..." (John 12:42). The infant Church, of course, was almost 100% Jewish!

The crowd yelling for His death were the Pharisees, Sadducees, the Temple priests, their officials, and their servants who feared Jesus' popularity. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation" (John 11:47-48). They allowed no threats to their positions of power. They were also appalled by Jesus' presuming to forgive sins (which only God could do) and by His inferred right to override Sabbath laws by healing on the Sabbath.

**As Christians, we know that Jesus came to give His life for us! The Jews did not murder Him. Everyone who has ever sinned had a part in Jesus' death. Yet, our sins did not put Jesus on the cross either. His love for us put Him there. God's desire to save us put Him there.**

There was a grave error made by theologians of the past and which still exists today in some parts of the Church called Supersessionism or Replacement Theology that claims the Church has replaced Israel as God's Chosen People and that Israel and the Jews no longer have any place in the plan of God. It teaches all the promises once made to Israel have been revoked.

Not true! **God's Word clearly states in Romans 9 – 11 that Israel is *not* rejected.** While at present, most Jews are not believers, there will come a time when they will turn to Jesus, their Messiah. The Apostle Paul used the picture of an olive tree to show that Gentile Christians have been grafted into the tree, and that the Jews, like branches now broken off, will be re-grafted into the tree in the future. **God will not forsake the Jews "for God's gifts and His call are irrevocable"** (Romans 11:29). God made a promise to Abraham regarding his descendants (Genesis 12), and God will always keep His promises! The Old Testament is rich with the promises of God that address the future of Israel as a nation.

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son....On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Zechariah 12:10; 13:1

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, "Isaiah" in *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation of the Jewish Publication Society*, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), page 890.
- <sup>ii</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1929), page 298.
- <sup>iii</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1927), page 290.
- <sup>iv</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, revised edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), page 241.
- <sup>v</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1983), page 209.
- <sup>vi</sup> William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus*, 1<sup>st</sup> paperback edition (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), page 194.
- <sup>vii</sup> Lawrence Richards, *Victor Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), page 80.
- <sup>viii</sup> From The Nicene Creed, the Second Article.
- <sup>ix</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible: Matthew through Romans* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), page 449.
- <sup>x</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete New Testament*, second edition (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2007), page 274.
- <sup>xi</sup> Richards, page 267.
- <sup>xii</sup> Edward A. Engelbrecht, editor, *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing, 2009), page 1742.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Wiersbe, page 74.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Part Two* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), page 57.
- <sup>xv</sup> F. W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Saviour* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), page 40.
- <sup>xvi</sup> W. E. Vine et al., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, revised edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), page 161.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament*, second edition (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2007), page 1520.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Morgan, *Mark*, page 296.
- <sup>xix</sup> "In the Hour of Trial" – lyrics by James Montgomery (1771-1854). In public domain.
- <sup>xx</sup> Vine, page 24.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Christ's Agony," quoted by Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), pages 198, 199.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Ratzinger, page 155.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Andrew Murray, *Holiest of All: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2004), page 196.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Murray, page 96.
- <sup>xxv</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Hebrews 1-7*, Thru the Bible Commentary Series (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1991), page 49.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), page 47.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> James Stalker, *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), page 13.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Ratzinger, page 182.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Stalker, page 83.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Krummacher, page 82.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Wiersbe, *The New Testament*, page 305.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Ratzinger, page 212.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Krummacher, page 379.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Krummacher, page 391.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Stalker, page 135.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Stalker, page 141.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), page 370.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Richards, page 146.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> *The Lutheran Study Bible*, page 1648.
- <sup>xl</sup> Morgan, *Matthew*, page 320.
- <sup>xli</sup> Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus*, page 289.
- <sup>xlii</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1931), page 277.
- <sup>xliii</sup> McGee, *Matthew Through Romans*, page 358.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Wiersbe, *The New Testament*, page 224.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Richards, page 102.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Ratzinger, page 275.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Ratzinger, page 230.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Morgan, *Matthew*, page 316.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Morgan, *Matthew*, page 315.
- <sup>l</sup> Wiersbe, *The New Testament*, page 307.

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