

WALK TO THE CROSS - HOLY WEEK - 14 to 21 April 2019

All four Gospels provide accounts of the activities that occurred during the week leading up to the crucifixion, death and resurrection. The daily devotionals try to capture the Holy Week based on scripture and traditional understanding of events. Some events may not have occurred on the date identified but every event noted occurred during the final week. Please don't let the date distract you from the purpose of your walk with Jesus.

14 April 2019 - Psalm Sunday

We start the week with Jesus as He makes the two-mile journey to Jerusalem from Bethany. Bethany was close to Jerusalem but far enough away that Jesus would not be hounded by crowds and so He could rest. Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived in Bethany and during the week, when Jesus' day was over, He would leave Jerusalem, cross the Kidron Valley, climb the slope of the Mount of Olives, and descend from the top of the mount into Bethany where He had relative safety. Jesus would spend most nights of His last week in Bethany.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He entered on a donkey while the crowd put down their cloaks and palm leaves for Him. They sang "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. "Hosanna" was the shout of praise or adoration made in recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Some believed that Jesus was coming to end the Roman occupation, yet He did not enter riding on a battle horse but on a humble donkey as foretold in Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Luke 19:41 shares that as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey that had never been ridden before, He wept over the devastation of Jerusalem.

Have you claimed discipleship with Jesus? Do you shout hosanna daily to one who saved you? Do you lay down your desires before Him and let His humble spirit walk over them so that His will is done?

Read Jesus' entry into Jerusalem found at *Matthew 21:1-11* and then reflect on the day *you* asked Him to be your King.

Consider this prayer: "Hail King Jesus. Thank you for leaving the relative safety of Bethany to take your place on the cross for me. Thank you for what you endured so that I would not have to undergo eternal separation from you. I know you desire that I learn and share your story and so as I start this week, I do so with an open heart and mind to be taught by the Holy Spirit. Grant me wisdom to understand the full implication of your week before the crucifixion so that I can share it with someone who needs you. Amen".

Monday 15 April 2019

On Monday Jesus visits the temple where he encounters people selling animals as a service to those who needed to sacrifice during Feast time. This activity had been approved by the Jewish temple leaders as it was a great convenience to Jews travelling great distances; they did not have to have livestock in tow. Jesus also met the money changers who also provided a service to travelling Jews who could get their foreign currency exchange into Hebrew currency. Jesus goes into the temple where he overturned the tables and said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers"

Jesus' complaint was not that dishonest buying and selling was happening in the temple - but that there is buying and selling going on at all! His complaint is that by buying and selling in the temple they have turned His Father's house into a house of merchandise. It was interfering with worship. Yesterday, many Christians entered their place of worship to honour and give thanks to God. All were present in body but how many were absent in spirit.

Read the story of the temple clearing found in Matthew: 21:12-17 and reflect on how you treat your worship. Jesus cleansed the Temple because sinful activities interfered with worship. Do you need to cleanse your heart of attitudes or actions that are coming between you and God?

Consider this prayer: "Father, you alone deserve my worship and praise and not just on Sunday's but every day you give me. Remind me when I come before you with my brothers and sisters that we do not gather to talk about ourselves but to talk with you and you with us. Amen".

Tuesday 16 April 2019

On Tuesday Jesus preached and taught in Jerusalem from early morning till late at night. He predicted the date of his execution and His authority was questioned. On Tuesday Jesus debated with religious leaders and replied to the wily questions of the Pharisees and scribes who tried to trap Him. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for their envy and deceit.

When the sun went down on Tuesday, His earthly teaching was done. As dusk approached, Jesus taught the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). He told His listeners, in essence, "You have one life." That's it. Some of you have all kinds of gifts and abilities; some of you have less. But don't squander the one and only "life" God has given you.

Read Matthew 21:28-25:46. It contains much of Jesus' last teachings. Jesus prophesied about His Second Coming and the Last Judgement. He talked about the Greatest Commandment and the signs of the times. He gave warnings and He gave woes.

Consider this prayer: "*Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life to you and ask that you come in as my saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life, make me the kind of person you want me to be. Amen*"

Wednesday 17 April 2019

Wednesday has been called "Spy Wednesday" by some who speculate that this is the day Judas Iscariot, a disciple turned betrayer, agreed to show the chief priests where they could easily capture Jesus. Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver which had been prophesized in Zechariah 11:12 with the words, "*So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.*" Note - thirty pieces of silver was the going rate for a slave at that time.

Read Matthew 26:15 and ask yourself, have you ever sold your faith for something else you wanted. Have you ever put off prayer, reading scripture, going to service because something else came up?

Wednesday may also have been the day when Jesus, who was relaxing in Bethany, was anointed with expensive perfume by a woman. When some disciples expressed concern about this alleged waste, Jesus shared that her actions were to prepare Him for His death.

Read Matthew 26:6-13. Have you ever second-guessed the motives of a ministry? Have you abandoned your brother or sisters because the secular world has? Do you care more about how they served God or why?

Consider this prayer: "Holy and merciful God free my heart from temptations of evil thoughts and actions that cause me to betray your followers in my words or actions. Help me see the actions of others as pleasing to you so that I can grow. Cleanse me so that I may become a fit habitation for the Holy Spirit to use me for your Kingdom's work. Amen.

Thursday 18 April 2019

On Thursday Jesus sent Peter and John ahead to the *Upper Room* in Jerusalem so He could celebrate the Passover with His disciples. The evening was filled with many symbolic acts as Jesus continued to teach and share His love. Just after sunset, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as they prepared to share in the Passover. By performing this humble act of service, Jesus demonstrated by example how they were to love one another. Jesus also instituted the Lord's Supper this night. As the Lamb of God, Jesus fulfilled the meaning of the Passover by giving his body to be broken and his blood to be shed in sacrifice, freeing us from sin and death. Using bread and wine to symbolize His body and blood, He asked us to remember His sacrifice by participating in communion in the future. The supper concluded with the singing of a hymn and a trip to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Gethsemane was a place familiar to Jesus as He and His disciples previously visited, and it was used by Jesus as a place of prayer. That night it also became His place of obedience as He surrendered His will to the Father. Later that night, because His betrayer knew Jesus' preference for the garden, Gethsemane became Jesus' place of capture.

Read Matthew 26:17-75 and identify and reflect on the examples of proper behaviour that Jesus displays through the evening. Can you humble yourself before others? Will you work with those who are weak and may betray you or God? Can you respect and serve even on your worst days?

Will you give your will over to God knowing that unpleasantness may result? Will you pray when life is good as well as when it is going poorly? Will you surrender your desires to God's purpose?

Consider this prayer: *“Lord, forgive me when I put my needs ahead of others, when I seek my way instead of yours, when I fear the path, I know you want me to take because it may require sacrifice and suffering. Give me grace and strength to trust that if necessary, I may have to enter the valley of the shadow of death but can trust that I will come out stronger and in better shape to reflect your glory. Amen.”*

Good Friday 19 April 2019

Writer and Pastor John Ortberg once stated there was no bleaker moment in human history than when mankind thought it would make sense to kill the creator of the universe. The events of Friday began with Jesus' betrayal early in the morning at the Garden of Gethsemane. The arrest was followed by six different trials:

Trial 1: Annas, whose name means “The grace of Jehovah” was one of the original antagonists against “The Son of Jehovah”. He briefly interrogated Jesus and subjected Him to the initial physical abuse.

Trial 2: In front of the current Jewish High Priest, Caiaphas (son-in-law of Annas) and the Sanhedrin Court where Jesus was again physically abused.

Trial 3: All the Jewish elders, including the High Priest, scribes and whole Sanhedrin interrogated and mocked Jesus. They decided to ask the Roman government to kill Jesus.

Trial 4: Hearing before Roman governor Pilate, who initially declared "I find no guilt in this man" and passed Him onto Herod.

Trial 5: A hearing before Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who had jurisdiction over Galilee. Jesus refused to answer any questions so Herod returned him back to Pilate.

Trial 6: Pilate repeatedly tried to release Jesus but the Jewish leaders continued to object. Pilate physically tortured and beat Jesus beyond recognition seeking to satisfy the Jewish leaders. However, the Jews demanded that Jesus should be crucified. Pilate resisted but eventually gave the order to execute Jesus.

The arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ all took place on Good Friday. It may be hard to understand what was good about that day but it was on this day that truth was revealed. The world would have us believe that there is no such thing as evil and with the right mindset, we can work it out and avoid suffering and eternal consequences. Jesus showed us that Evil really does exist and suffering really does hurt, but what was good about that Friday was the realization that God can take even the worst events and make them good.

Read Matthew 26:47 to 27:61.

Consider this prayer: “Lord, I may not have been standing in the crowds when you were being judged, but it is because of my sins that you went through the trials and abuse. I may not comprehend the humility and ill-treatment you faced but I know that you were not ashamed to have done it for me. Holy Spirit, I do not want Jesus’ sacrifice to be for nothing. Will you help me see, understand, and accept the truths that lead to my salvation so that I can stand before Him and thank him face-to-face. Amen.”

Saturday 20 April 2019

On Saturday, a Sabbath day, the high priests and Pharisees gathered together before Pilate and asked him to have Jesus' tomb sealed until the third day. So, Jesus' body lay in the tomb guarded by Roman soldiers.

Nicodemus had helped place Jesus’ body in the tomb on Friday before the Sabbath began, and had even paid for the burial spices for Jesus. Like Joseph of Arimathea, he was a member of the Sanhedrin. This was the court which had condemned Jesus Christ to death. Both men had lived as secret followers of Jesus, afraid to make a public profession of faith because of their prominent positions in the Jewish community. Similarly, both were deeply affected by Christ's death. They boldly came out of hiding, risking their reputations and their lives because they now realized Jesus was, indeed, the long-awaited Messiah.

Do you live your faith is secret? Do you think something more important hinges on your need to hide your faith in Jesus?

Read Matthew 27:62-66). Saturday was the day between the promise and the fulfilment of the promise. Jesus had not only predicted He would be crucified, but also that He would rise from the dead. Our salvation is based on that promise.

Consider this prayer: “Heavenly Father, today as I think about that short period of time that your son was in the tomb I know that eternity was at stake. Thank you for keeping your promise to Adam and Eve despite their disappointing behaviour in the garden. Thank you for arranging this act of reconciliation so I will not have to spend eternally separated from you. Thank you that despite how often I disappoint, you love me enough to allow me to acknowledge, repent and ask forgiveness for my sins. Thank you that the tomb did not hold Jesus. Amen”

Easter Sunday 21 April 2019 – Resurrection Day

He rises. Jesus had told his disciples in advance that he would rise again on the third day after his death. He had been buried in a tomb guarded by a huge stone and soldiers so that no one could steal the body. When some women came to visit the grave on that Sunday morning, they found that the huge stone had been moved and the tomb was empty. Jesus was seen that day and for several days later, and revisited old friends who realized what had been prophesied had come true. Jesus had indeed risen from the dead and so all he said before and after the cross must be true.

Read Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24 and John 20.

Today, you sit in judgment of Jesus Christ. Just as Pilate asked, “What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?”

You also must decide whether he was who he said or not.

FINAL REFLECTION

WHAT DOES EASTER MEAN

- God loves you
 - “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” John 3:16

THE PROBLEM IS

- All of us have done, said or thought things that are wrong. This is called sin, and our sins have separated us from God.
 - “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23 and
 - “The wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT ABOUT 2,000 YEARS AGO

- God sent His son to die for our sins.
 - “God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

YOU CAN CHOOSE TO ASK JESUS CHRIST TO FORGIVE YOUR SINS AND BE YOUR LORD AND SAVIOUR.

If you have never considered asking Jesus to be the Lord of your life, consider:

PRAYING:

“Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need your forgiveness. I believe that you died on the cross for my sins and rose from the grave to give me life. I know you are the only way to God so now I want to quit disobeying you and start living for You. Please forgive me.”

If you believe but have not followed through with your heart and actions, consider:

PRAYING:

“I acknowledge that I have been directing my own life and as a result, I have sinned against you. I thank you that you have forgiven my sins through your death on the cross. I now invite you to again take your place on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as you commanded me to be filled, and as you promised in your word that you would do as I ask in faith. I now thank you for directing my life and filling me with the Holy Spirit.”

Regardless of which one of these two prayers you may have prayed today, share your decision with a friend or your pastor so you can have someone to encourage you on your walk with Jesus.