



JOURNEY *to the* CROSS

A Devotional Guide for Passion Week

 Cloverdale Baptist Church

HOW THE *JOURNEY* TO THE CROSS BEGAN...

Jesus began to explain [clearly] to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and must [endure] suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (NIV) Matthew 16:21



The Passion Week: *The Journey to the Cross*

The final week of Jesus' earthly life is referred to as the Passion Week or the Holy Week and is the span from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, seven days from the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem to His resurrection, the next Sunday.

In this on-line devotional, we want to highlight "*The Journey to the Cross*," during this final week, and make applications into our own lives. We want our journey to reflect cross-bearing. As Hudson Taylor said years ago, "*Fruit-bearing involves cross-bearing. There are not two Christs, an easy-going one for easy-going Christians, and a suffering, toiling one for exceptional believers. There is only one Christ.*"¹ The cross of Christ is not a gold-plated pendant to enhance one's looks, nor a mystical religious icon, to hold magical powers, or a wooden cosmetic crucifix to be an ornament. The cross He bore – and the one we are to bare – burdensome, cumbersome, fearsome, and sometimes tiresome. God has not called the disciples to an evening garden party, a group gathering, or a "no cost-free lunch,"² there is no such thing.

The cross is a scandal, a disgrace, and a setback to the world, an emblem of suffering and shame; but also, the signature and stamp of Jesus Christ in the lives of believers today. Persecution suffered by Christians around the world reminds us how dearly followers of Christ have paid for who and what they believe in, and whose they really are.³

Jesus predicted His betrayal, rejection, and death three times – in Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:31), on the way to Capernaum (Mark 9:30-32), and, before reaching Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34). All passages state that Jesus said he must "suffer."

The week before Passover, Jesus is in Bethany ministering and being ministered to by those who love Him while staying with Lazarus, Mary, Martha, and Simon the Leper. It is also where Mary anoints the head and feet of Jesus with expensive oil, the cost of which was around 200 denarii.⁴ Sunday morning dawns and Jesus and His disciples are on the move, the journey to the cross continues toward Jerusalem, and on the way, Jesus asks Peter and John to go to Bethphage and bring him a colt of a donkey that has never been ridden. Riding on a colt was a statement of humility⁵, which Jesus did to show He was different than their expectations of a majestic Messiah. In short, it was meekness and majesty,⁶ which was manifested, entering the city with royal authority.

¹ Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor. *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 236-37.

² A free lunch refers to a situation where there is no cost incurred by the individual receiving the goods or services being provided.

³ Open Doors estimates that in 2019 - 245 million Christians experience high levels of persecution. Some 61% of the world's population live in countries where religious freedom is not respected resulting in violence, arrest, and human rights violations. Islamic Oppression fuels Christians persecution in 8 of the top 10 countries.

⁴ A denarius ("penny") was what an agricultural worker typically was paid for one day's labor (Matt 20:2).

⁵ Meekness. Our culture does not hold meekness to be a virtue in contrast to the Eastern world which placed a high premium on it. Most Bible translations now use gentleness and or humility especially exhibited during suffering or difficulty and accompanied by faith in God. (New Nave's Topical Bible, Holman Illustrated Bible Dict.)

⁶ Graham Kendrick. "Meekness and Majesty," Album 2002

Jesus is Anointed

John 12:1-11

*Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard,
An expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus'
feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house
was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

John 12:3

Total Devotion

Mary's act of extravagant worship points us toward the Cross. What a remarkable picture of true devotion – Mary is unashamed, humble, with an extravagant gesture.

Jesus finds himself enjoying the generous hospitality and intimate fellowship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus who has just returned to life (John 11:44). It's a small party, Matthew and Mark tell us, with the disciples and Simon the Leper celebrating the return of Lazarus' from dead. The text tells us that Lazarus is reclining at the table with Jesus, Martha the ever-present hostess is serving food and Mary once again is showing her dedication to Jesus. Mary in total devotion to Jesus who formerly had sat at His feet as a disciple (Lk 10:39), now acts in an even greater open display of worship, she anoints Jesus' feet with costly perfume and then wipes his feet with her hair. Mary may not have known the full importance of what she was doing in providing this display of honor, but Jesus does. So close is Jesus' death that He blesses Mary's gesture as perfectly acceptable in the context of what will soon happen - it is perfume meant for His burial. It is tempting for us to skip from Palm Sunday to Easter, without spending time on the severe injustice of Jesus suffering and death. The fact is that the divine plan of salvation arrived at Easter only after Jesus' trial, death, and burial.

The pervasive fragrance of the ointment that filled the house told all present of her sacrificial gift, which allows us to see the pronounced contrast between Mary and Judas: Mary is generous, Judas is greedy. Mary is humble, Judas is arrogant. Mary is selfless, Judas is self-centered. Judas stands aloof, Mary kneels in humble adoration to worship her Lord.

Our call is for each of us to follow Mary's lead, to become disciples of total devotion to Jesus. Imagine what kind of love would lead you to readily part with a year's wages or perhaps your life savings, as a fitting response to the Lord of life.



Palm Sunday & Cleansing The Temple

Matthew 21:1-17

*This took place to fulfill what was spoken through
The prophet: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your King is
coming to you, gentle [humble] and riding on a donkey.'"⁷*

Matthew 21:4-5

His Kingdom

God's Vision for Peace and Reconciliation. We must long to reconcile with our brother and sister or we miss a crucial aspect of what this teaches.

Imagine "The Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem. It must have been the height of joy for His 12 disciples, finally their master, their teacher was being acknowledged with a parade of waving palm branches, clothes on the ground, with the crowds shouting, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" What a great demonstration of God's miraculous works – the deaf spoke, the blind saw, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, and the gospel was being preached (Luke 7:22). His disciples must have asked themselves "*could this truly be the Messiah come to establish peace in Jerusalem, throwing off the yoke of Roman rule?*" The praise for Jesus was not unanimous however, for the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke his disciples, a sign of things to come.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem ended at the temple, where He drove out those who were hawking their wares and saying to them, "*It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers*" (Luke 19:45, 46). According to Jesus, the leaders of his day were preventing the temple from becoming the "*house of prayer for all nations.*" Jesus isn't simply concerned about the corruption of the temple; he's concerned about what the corruption means for Gentiles encountering God.

The temple and the palms have the same message which is that it is God's desire for the peoples of the world divided by strife to be reconciled under the kingship of the Messiah and to join together in worship of the one true God.⁸

We need our hearts to be captured by the vision of the church as the place where the nations speak peace to one another and worship the triune God together. Esau McCaulley⁹ comments ring true in that "*our life together is not an implication of the gospel; it is a manifestation of it.*"



Passion Sunday

⁷ Zechariah 9:9

⁸ Jesus engages in two symbolic actions with Old Testament foundations from Zechariah 9:9-10 & Isaiah 56:6-9

⁹ Esau McCaulley is assistant professor of New Testament at Northeastern Seminary.

Thoughts and Prayers

Sunday:

Matthew 21:1-17

Spend time: thinking about Palm Sunday and Jesus cleansing the temple?

Read: Eph. 2:14-22, consider how peace and reconciliation are ultimately tied to Christ's reconciling work on the Cross (v. 16).

Pray For...

1. Peace and reconciliation between Jews & Gentiles - that one day we will worship together.
2. A longing to be reconciled to our brothers, sisters, neighbors, etc.
3. Our message is to be clear, that God desires for us to be reconciled to Him and to each other.
4. That we will be able to meet together in worship very soon.

The Last Supper

John 13:1-17

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

John 13:14-15

The Servant

Jesus Revealed what He prized the Most. We are called to ask, “where is my Cross?” How can we lay down our lives in self-giving love for others?

On this “last night” together, Jesus gathers his disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem to share a meal with them. His mind must have been the thought of what to show and teach them, which would be of great importance. Jesus reveals to us that what He highly prized was servanthood. He takes a towel and a basin of water and washes His disciples’ feet, a degrading and lowly task. In washing their feet, Jesus is adopting the posture of a slave, teaching them that they are to be servants, not master, commanding places of importance. Jesus is not necessarily teaching that we need to literally be washing each other’s feet, but that we need to be involved in the very humble and real service one to another. A call to all of us to be self-denying, self-sacrificing, unselfish, disregarding our own comfort for the needs of others.

In Nagasaki, Japan, 26 Japanese martyrs were killed for their faith in Christ on February 5, 1597. They were forced to walk 600 miles from Kyoto to Nagasaki, and when they arrived on the hill where they were to be crucified, one was not given a cross because he was only 12 years old. The boy asked, “where is my cross,” becoming the 26th martyr. Though we are not asked to die for our faith on this day, Jesus is asking us as His disciples “to live for Him,” to take up our cross daily and follow Him.

Nothing speaks as loudly as acts of loving service within our places of worship and in our communities where we live. The question we need to ask is “how can we lay down our lives in self-giving love for others?”



Monday

Thoughts and Prayers

Monday:

John 13:1-17

Spend time: considering how extreme this act was to His first century disciples; how does it challenge you?

Read: Phil. 2:3-11. Jesus gave up his privilege - not his power. Why is this distinction important?

Pray For...

1. An attitude willing to serve others with a humble heart (phone calls, facetime, send cards of care)
2. Opportunities to be involved in acts of service and or kindness in your neighborhood and community during the covid-19 isolation.
3. the next homeless or down-and-out person you see. Explore ways you can really help them without giving them money.
4. What are some ways that we can lay down our lives in self-giving love for others.
5. Note your own sense of privilege and ask Him to help you give that up for Him.

The Garden Of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-45

*“He fell with His face to the ground and prayed,
‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken
from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”*

Matthew 26:39

Not my Will

The struggle and joy of Surrender. Here we discover that it really is possible to overcome our own wants, to push past them into glad surrender.

With the disciples asleep, Jesus is alone with His thoughts as He moves a little further into the Garden of Gethsemane, falling on His face, He prays to God His Father, *“is it possible that this cup that is before him, be removed?”* Jesus is facing a real temptation, the most severe of his life – that the cross is unnecessary, that it is needless or avoidable.

Jesus has the sweat dripping off of Him like drops of blood. We can see that He is grief-stricken and distressed. *“Yet not as I will, but as you will,”* shows us that God is in control, which is the most important lesson that we can learn from this passage. How to experience this in our day-to-day activities is one of the chief growing lessons of our discipleship to Jesus.

You may be facing the sickness or death of a child, a difficult marriage, or maybe you have been diagnosed with a serious illness. All of us are facing an uncertain future as a result of Covid-19. Remember, all of these things can and will threaten or put pressure on the stability of your life. The thing to remember is that God is there to walk us through anything if we will only to turn to Him. A well-known saying that rings true is *“In His will, is our peace.”*¹⁰



Tuesday

¹⁰ Ricardo J. Quinones, “Dante,” Encyclopedia Britannica 2003, www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=117772.

Thoughts and Prayers

Tuesday:

Matthew 26:36-45

Spend time: what is your attention drawn to as you reflect on Jesus struggle in *Gethsemane*?

Read: Phil. 4:6-7 & Matt. 6:9-13.

What does it look like to bring honest desires before *God* and simultaneously pray for *God's* will to be done?

Pray For...

1. A desire to fully surrender our will to the Father.
2. The strength to overcome your own wants and surrender them to Him.
3. An inner strength and rest - firm confidence that whatever *God* asks us to endure is for His purpose.
4. *God* to work in your life, shaping your will to align with His?

Jesus is Betrayed & Abandoned

Mark 14:41-52

“Then everyone deserted Him and fled.”

Mark 14:50

Betrayed & Abandoned

We all have Failed Him. The disciples were cowardly, disloyal, and unfaithful, just like us. The friends of Jesus, failed miserably and utterly at the time of greatest crisis, when courage was most needed. How closely is that like us, and how do we follow Him?

In the middle of Christ’s struggle, crucifixion and resurrection, the disciples displayed weakness, confusion, and fear. During the last supper, they are told one of them would betray Him and the rest would abandon Him. They responded by saying He was misjudging them and then began to argue about who was the greatest. They fell asleep more than once while Jesus wanted them to watch and pray for Him. They panicked and ran while Jesus was arrested, later Peter swore that he didn’t know Jesus.

The description of the disciples during this week was *“Everyone deserted him and fled”* (Mark 14:50). Christ’s dearest friends, failed Him at the time of His greatest need. They just disappeared, vanished, totally defeated.

Something earth-shattering happened to turn a group of confused, fearful men to become radically bold evangelists, willing to be killed to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. Their lives were changed by seeing the risen Christ themselves.

We, like the Apostles have broken the law, have abandoned Him and have sworn that we don’t know him. But a risen Christ has revealed Himself through His word, has changed us and we have believed, surrendering our lives to Him. It almost seems too good to be true, and yet it is true.



Wednesday

Thoughts and Prayers

Wednesday:

Mark 14:41-52

Spend time: engaging your imagination to consider what the disciples likely felt and thought during this experience.

Read: I Tim. 1:12-17 what role does facing one's failures and sinfulness play in the life of faith?

Pray For...

1. strength so that you will never betray or abandon Christ
2. God to use your failure for His good and that it will serve to strengthen others in their devotion to Jesus
3. God to use your failures and weaknesses to impact your own devotion to Jesus?

Jesus' Arrest & Trial

John 18:1-19:16

*"So again, Pilate asked him,
'Aren't you going to answer?
See how many things they
are accusing you of.'"*

Mark 15:4

Confident Resolve

Handling opposition. Rejection will come, just as it did for the Master, but how we respond to it should reflect the path He took.

Jesus taught his disciples that they would face opposition, resistance, and rejection just as He did. We need to learn from Him how He faced the intense rejection by the world that the cross represented.

1. Trust the Father. Jesus did not fight back or reflect fear in the face of rejection. Jesus knew that the call the Father had given to him included this time.
2. Jesus rested in the confidence of His identity. I Peter 3:14 expresses the idea this way: "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.'" Rejection will come, just as it did for the Master, but how we respond to it should reflect the path he took.
3. We rest in the confidence that vindication and justice will come. When we face opposition, it can seem so risky to let such circumstances go, not to fight back. Jesus knew a day of vindication would come, which gave him confidence to be faithful as he was accused and tried. The Resurrection we celebrate was God's vindication of Jesus' claim.

How can we respond to resistance or rejection? Like Christ did. We trust God in the face of opposition. We rest in the identity God gives us so we need not fear that rejection and overreact. We know that in the vindication tied to Jesus we find our own restoration when all will be set right. In this is the way of the Cross.



Thursday

Thoughts and Prayers

Thursday:

John 18:1-19:16

Spend time: how would you characterize Jesus' response to Him being questioned by the Pharisees, Herod and Pilate?

Read: John 15:18-25 & I Peter 3:14-16, 4:12-19. How do these passages comfort, encourage, or challenge you?

Pray For...

1. strength to respond appropriately to rejection or resistance.
2. *God to strengthen your own confidence and security in Him.*
3. *God to help you handle a situation or relationship differently than you have in the past.*

The Crucifixion

Mark 15:21-39

“Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means “My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?”).

Mark 15:34

Forsaken

The Suffering of Christ. To share in the life of Jesus means to share in all of His life, and that means to share in His suffering.

Jesus speaks the words, words that you may have asked of God “why have you forsaken or left me?” Sometimes it may be unspoken, but the thought or feeling is there, an ongoing experience of God’s absence. God seems to not be a living reality, in that you are at a place of deep and profound need, but God does not answer. There is only silence.

Mark Galli, editor of Christianity today says that “the goodness of God is actually most manifest in these moments of forsakenness. In fact, it is in the very experience of forsakenness that He is revealing Himself to us afresh.”¹¹ Part of the problem is that we want to have an intimate life with God but never want to know the experience of being forsaken. Yet to share in the life of Jesus means to share in all of his life, and that means to share in his suffering.

For us to suffer the loss of all things means, among other things to suffer the loss of things that have become idols. To suffer the loss of all means to say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Ga. 2:20).



Friday

¹¹ Mark Galli, editor in chief of the Evangelical magazine, Christianity Today. 2019
Christianitytoday.com/biblestudies.

Thoughts and Prayers

Friday:

Mark 15:21-39

Spend time: reflect on what strikes you about Christ's words (vs. 34)? What role does suffering and forsakenness play in the life of devotion to Christ.

Read: Phil. 3:7-11; 2 Cor. 1:3-5 & I Peter 4:15. What does it mean to share in Christ's suffering? What doesn't it mean?

Pray For...

1. God to deepen your understanding of what it means for you to share in His suffering
2. the persecuted church, especially for those in North Korea, Pakistan, Moldavia, & China. Pray that those being persecuted will remain faithful and not deny Christ.
3. times of God's silence in your life, that you will trust Him and His care for you.
4. God to change your perspective on or reaction to suffering.

The Tomb

John 19:31-42

*“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate
For the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple
of Jesus ... He came and took the body away.”*

John 19:38

Waiting

The darkness and uncertainty of Saturday. Faith isn't just Good Friday and Easter Sunday; faith is Saturday as well, when all is dark and silent.

For a believer the “Silence of God” during a crisis of faith is the most difficult to handle. We twist and turn, wondering what to do next. We ask God, “what do you want us to do, what direction should we take,” and the answer is silence. Some have referred to this as “the heavens are made of brass.” There is no response. All is quiet. Waiting.... A.J. Swoboda calls it a “holy day to sit, wait, hope – unsure of what’s to come tomorrow.”¹²

No thinking Christian will be able to evade the issue of God’s silence and inactivity in the face of suffering. On some days we may find prayer impossible. Pain, anguish and grief can become so consuming that there is nothing left, all is spent, all is exhaustion. There are periods when the emotional insult of evil, injustice and destruction leave us emotionally, intellectually and spiritually numb. It is precisely at such points when the intercession of the Holy Spirit on our behalf becomes especially important: “the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26; cp 8:34).

Oswald Chambers said that just because *“Jesus Christ keeps silent does not mean that He is displeased, but exactly the opposite. He is bringing us into the great run of His purpose, and the answer will be an amazing revelation.”*¹³

It is at these points in our lives when we are tempted to doubt if God cares, or when discouragement grows and blooms into bitterness, that we need to be reminded of the Word of God. In Psalm 78:5-8, the writer is telling one generation to tell their children about God.

*Arise and tell them to their children,
So that they should set their hope in God
And not forget the works of God,
But Keep His commandments*



Saturday

¹² A.J. Swoboda. “A Glorious Dark,” Baker Books (2014)

¹³ Oswald Chambers. *If You Will Ask*. P. 54.

Saturday

John 19:31-42

Spend time: notice the details, and what the Gospel writers emphasized?

Read: Psalm 130:1-2, 5-6 & Heb. 11:1. How is waiting an act of devotion? How might God be inviting you to wait in your life right now?

Pray For...

1. God to help you during times of silence.
2. Ask Him to strengthen your "trust in Him: during times of uncertainty, confusion, or doubt."
3. Ask God to erase your doubt even when you don't have tangible evidence.
4. Allow God to break through into your life on the eve of Easter

Thoughts and Prayers

HE HAS RISEN

John 20:1-18

*Do not be afraid, for I know
That you are looking for Jesus,
Who was crucified. He is not here;
He has risen, just as He said.*

Matthew 28:5-6

The Resurrection

He Has Risen, He Has Risen Indeed. What the disciples knew was that their hope had been realized – Jesus came to redeem not just Israel but the whole world – that is a sure hope.

The Resurrection is an unprecedented event in history. In the words of C.S. Lewis, it is a miracle of the New Creation. Everything is different, radically altered. It seems now, Jesus can only be recognized by those to whom He chooses to reveal himself.

When Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James told the disciples what they had heard and seen the disciples hearing the news, did not rejoice. In fact, in Luke 24:11 it says “*and the word appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe the women.*” The first doubters of the resurrection were Jesus’ own disciples. They thought the women were crazy and irrational. They retreated in fear, they were shocked, stunned, taken totally off guard. In fact, Peter and John not believing the women’s report, ran to the tomb to see for themselves. (John 20:3-9).

In Luke 24:12 it says that Peter “*stooping and looking in, saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at that which had happened.*” Seeing was believing.

It was true, Jesus was alive! He had Risen Indeed.

The journey to the Cross now becomes our journey after the Cross. Our hearts need to burn, knowing that this journey is a good one. And it’s never taken alone.



Sunday

A Concluding Thought

When we consider the price, our Lord paid to ransom our captive souls, it should cause us to tremble. Such sacrifice. Such devotion. We are left with only one response, really. *Such an extreme price paid for our salvation calls for an extreme commitment.* The kind of commitment Isaac Watts wrote about in “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.*”

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Isaac Watts, pub. 1707

