

THE JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

April 5, 2020

As we prepare for Easter, let's journey back through time nearly 2000 years to what some people call Holy Week or Passion Week.

The days between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday are days packed with real historical events of meaning and power.

We are going to briefly consider what happened on each of those days in Jesus' life and in the lives of His followers and those who betrayed Him.

As we follow the journey of Jesus to the Cross and beyond, my prayer is that God will enable each of us to see our Saviour in a new light and we will draw closer to Him as we are reminded of His love for us and His willing sacrifice for our sins and our salvation.

Let's start a little earlier than Palm Sunday, let's start in Bethany.

Jesus had been staying in Bethany with His friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (see John 12).

Mary had anointed Jesus with spikenard, one of the most expensive perfumes that existed at that time, and Judas objected at the financial "waste" because he was secretly a thief.

Let me tell you a little more about spikenard so you can really appreciate what Mary was doing.

Spikenard was an uncommon perfume extracted from grasses that grew in India.

The juices were squeezed out of the grass, then they were dried into a hard, lardlike substance.

Turning that lardlike substance into perfume was a very lengthy and costly process.

If you add to that the cost of transporting spikenard from India to other parts of the

world, you can understand why this perfume cost so much money.

Spikenard was so expensive that few people could buy it, in fact, it was so valuable it was normally reserved and used as gifts for kings and nobility.

This was the gift Mary brought to Jesus and not just a little bit of it, depending on which translation you read, she brought a pound or pint of it to Jesus.

Mary took the lid off the bottle, tipped it downward, and began to pour it onto Jesus' feet.

This kind of perfume was not normally used on feet!

It was used to anoint the heads of kings and dignitaries.

I suppose that is why Judas thought it was a terrible waste.

But for Mary, this was an expression of love. Mary loved, appreciated, and valued even the feet of her Lord.

Now let us consider Palm Sunday.

Jesus left Bethany and entered Jerusalem on a donkey as was prophesied in Zechariah 9:9, Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The crowds hailed Jesus waving palm branches crying out "***Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!***" (John 12:13).

The people who called out "Save us!" were expecting a warrior king who would free them from Roman oppression.

Jesus came on a donkey, a sign of humility and peace, and He came with a very different kind of salvation in mind; the eternal salvation of all who would trust in Him as Lord and Saviour.

Just as Jesus entered into Jerusalem that day, He is still entering into relationships with people today.

He is our Saviour and King, He seeks to enter into a real relationship with us, He seeks to spend time with us.

If you know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you are not just a faceless person in the crowd, you are known, you are loved, and you are adopted into the family of the everlasting King.

Monday

On Monday, Jesus cleansed the temple.

People from all over the known world travelled to Jerusalem.

When they arrived, they needed to exchange their Greek or Roman money in preparation for Passover.

Jesus saw the money changers within the temple courts, in the Holy place.

The fact that the money changers were running their businesses inside God's house was bad enough, but they also took advantage of the poor and the widows.

Jesus' heart was filled with love for the people who were being obstructed from worshipping God and for the people who needed to be healed.

Matthew 21:12-14, Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ***“It is written,” He said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’ “The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them.***

God wants us to fully worship Him, He is worthy of our total devotion.

If we put a barrier between us and God, or if we make something more important than Him, that thing, or person, or activity, or addiction has become an idol and Jesus wants to clear it out of the way so we can have freedom, healing, and

wholeness in Him.

Have you put a barrier between you and God?

Are you allowing something to distract you from fully worshipping Him?

What do you need Jesus to overturn in your life so that you can freely worship Him?

Tuesday

On Tuesday Jesus demonstrated the power of His words. Matthew 21:23-27, *Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”*

Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then He said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The chief priests and elders wanted to know who Jesus thought He was. They questioned His authority to teach and to heal.

Jesus did not waste His words; He chose to speak words that would honour God and help others.

Do you ever speak without considering your words?

Have you ever said something without thinking first?

If you are in a challenging situation do you pause and ask God to help you to speak

like Jesus?

Wednesday

Wednesday was a day of betrayal.

Matthew 26:14-16, *Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him over to you?” So, they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.*

Judas Iscariot, at one point in his life had made the decision to follow Jesus.

Judas left his old life behind and followed Jesus for three years.

Judas had walked the dusty roads with Jesus.

Judas had heard every message and every parable with his own ears.

Judas had seen miracles and healing with his own eyes.

Judas had experienced the love of Jesus, yet on Wednesday Judas chose to betray Jesus.

Instead of love, instead of friendship, instead of loyalty, Judas chose hatred and betrayal.

Judas seems to have been filled with anger, resentment, maybe disappointment or disillusion.

At this point, Judas has a greater love for money more than Jesus.

Judas chose to turn his back on Jesus and to walk away.

Sadly, over the years, I have known people who have chosen to walk away from Jesus.

To sell Him out, not for 30 pieces of silver, they have sold Him out for other things like their careers, or to live a sinful life.

Some have pursued money, or sex, or fame; others walked away simply because

God didn't do what they expected Him to do for them.

Some have walked away because they were unwilling to submit to God's plans and purpose for them, to truly acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and as Lord.

May God help each of us to keep on keeping on and to willingly follow God's will in every aspect of our lives.

THURSDAY

Every time we take communion together, we remember that Thursday.

Matthew 26:26-28, *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

The disciples gathered together in the upper room.

The table was set, the Passover meal was ready.

The meal, we tend to think about the bread and wine but there would also have been lamb, bitter herbs, olives, stew and dates.

The irony of Thursday night is that the disciples were celebrating Passover with Jesus, the One we call the Lamb of God.

Jesus was about to be sacrificed on the Cross for them and for all of us.

His body broken and His blood shed for our sins.

1 John 3:16 says, *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.*

This is love. This is mercy. This is grace.

God loves you so much He provided the way for you to be saved.

Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself for you, for me, for all who trust in Him as

Lord and Saviour.

Jesus also went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed to His Father God, crying out to Him from His humanity knowing what He was about to endure. Then Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

Jesus was arrested.

Thursday was a powerful and a very meaningful day!

FRIDAY

Good Friday.

Matthew 27:1-2, *Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans on how to have Jesus executed. So, they bound Him, led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate the governor.*

Jesus had been arrested, beaten, charged illegally, tried illegally, and terror had gripped the hearts of the disciples.

Are we next? How did this happen?

Wasn't He supposed to overturn the government?

Wasn't He supposed to be the new King?

Wasn't He supposed to save us from our enemies? And now, we're on the run for our lives?

Good is probably not the word the disciples of Jesus would have used to describe their day.

Some of the disciples had seen Jesus crucified.

John 19:25-27, *Near the cross of Jesus, stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on,*

this disciple took her into his home.

What agony they witnessed and what agony they endured on Friday seeing Jesus crucified on the cross.

After the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday, they would understand what had happened, but there, on that Friday, that terrifying, horrific Friday, they did not understand that Jesus had died to save His people from their sins, to save them, to save us, to save you and me.

On that Friday, the heavy 30-foot curtain veiling the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom by God Himself to give us, all of us who put our faith in Jesus, full access into the presence of our God.

Saturday

Silent Saturday.

Matthew 27:57-61, There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. Jesus was dead and buried.

Hope was dead and buried.

The Bible is mostly silent about what the disciples did on Saturday, Luke 23:56 says they rested according to the Law of God, but I don't think it would have been a peaceful time of rest for them.

The disciples were hiding, grieving and fearful.

Peter denies knowing Jesus!

Friends, we know a great truth that the disciples did not know on that Saturday.

We have the blessing of knowing, Jesus is alive and always with us.

He is not dead, He is not in the grave, He is alive and always with us!

Sunday

Resurrection Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10,

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, “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. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” So, the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy and ran to tell His disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them.

“Greetings,” He said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshipped Him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

He is risen! Jesus has risen!

Our Lord and Saviour is risen!

Death did not have the victory; Jesus did!

His resurrection is the proof He was who He said He was.

Jesus is Lord. He is Saviour. He is Healer. He is *“The Coming King”* and the truth of that Sunday is death has been defeated; the price has been paid; forgiveness is possible for all who believe and trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

I will close with this. We have followed the journey of Jesus to the Cross and beyond.

Do you understand the love He has for you?

Can you see what He endured for you?

Have you turned to Him?

Have you accepted Him as your Lord and your Saviour?

Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself for your sins and for your salvation, will you willingly give yourself to Him and be saved?

Let us pray.

O God, our Father, during this Holy Week, enable each of us to open our hearts and lives that the King of glory may come in and may we say from the depths of our being, *“Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”* (Mark 11:9)

During this week help us to remember all He went through.

Call us to watch and pray with him.

We thank you, Father, for all the ways You have blessed us; bringing about good for us; bringing hope out of struggle, peace out of suffering, strength in the midst of our struggles and the light of your love shining as we have travelled.

Give us patience with those who try ours. Help us to forgive those who speak evil against us. And help us love even those who are difficult to love, because they are loved by You. Give us peace in the world and help us to be peacemakers.

Assist us, O God, to be more expressive in our relationship with you, to show forth

your boundless generosity through our own caring.

Grant us, O Lord, courage in our obedience to you and strength in our service.

Make us ever mindful of the sin that leads to death and of the righteousness that leads to life. And help us trust, O God, not in ourselves, but rather in you.

We pray for the world you have given us to live in and look after. We have not done a very good job of being stewards of your world. Help us to care for your world so that it will be a place of peace.

We think particularly today for those around this world who are ill and dying, particularly from this terrible, life threatening virus.

We pray for the medical workers, who are putting their lives on the line to care for the sick. Keep them safe and may they be able to take the precautions that are needed so they are not put in danger.

We pray for families and loved ones who are dealing with isolation and who are grieving the loss of loved ones during this time. Give them comfort in knowing that their loved ones are no longer suffering. Wrap your loving arms around them and give them peace.

We know people whose work has been stopped because of closures and are facing financial difficulties.

Let us all remember that God is still in control and that you continue to love and protect us.

We ask that you give the leaders of these countries the wisdom and the will to do what is right and just for all people. All these things we ask, most gracious God, in the name of our crucified redeemer.

Amen

BENEDICTION

Be in peace, remembering all that Jesus endured for your sake; and may God bless you and keep you safe in His knowledge and His love, both now and forevermore.

AMEN