

GCCSI DEVOTIONAL



LENT

2020

Week 4

Passion Week

Day 1: The Triumphal Entry

Read Mark 11:1-11

For this week's devotions, we'll be following the events of Jesus' life the week before the crucifixion. This time period is known as Passion Week. During the week, we read about Jesus' time in Jerusalem during the Passover celebration. We will read about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, his debates with the religious leaders, Judas' betrayal and the Last Supper. Most importantly, we learn about the things that lead to Jesus' trial and crucifixion and how the Son of Man prepared for his suffering.

All four gospel accounts tell of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem as a significant event. The city was bustling with travelers gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Before Jesus entered Jerusalem, Jesus sent his disciples ahead to get a young donkey. The disciples put their cloaks on the donkey and placed Jesus on it. Others spread cloaks along the road. As word got out of Jesus' arrival, more people gathered along the road leading to Jerusalem. Some collected palm branches and waved them in the air. Mark tells us that at some point, people came together and shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

In order to understand this event, we need to understand the cultural background of what was going on. Although the people living in the region were ruled by the religious leaders and had a local king, they were under the authority and control of Rome. The Jewish people in Judea at the time were fiercely independent. To the Romans, the area was a known as hotspot of insurrection and for its strange Jewish religion that insisted that people believe in one God without compromise. Roman soldiers assigned to the area were on high alert knowing that a rebellion could occur at any moment. To the Jews living in Judea, many yearned for independence and dreamed of a day when the Promised Messiah of the Scriptures would come, drive out the Romans, and bring God's kingdom on earth.

It is in this context that Passion week begins. Jesus' coming into Jerusalem on a donkey wasn't something that was decided at the last minute. It was a deliberate decision. Hundreds of years before, the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 9:9) wrote of how the Messianic King of Israel would come to Jerusalem riding on a donkey and this Messianic King would sit on the throne of the ancient King David. This was something the Jews in Jesus' day must have understood when they saw Jesus coming to the ancient capital city of David riding on a donkey. For years, Jesus had been going about preaching about the kingdom of God and healing people. Was this the time when the promised Messiah would finally take over? Was this the time when he would take the throne and be crowned

the ruler over God's Kingdom? There was good reason for us to think the crowds were thinking this way.

First, the way the crowds were gathered was the way a crowd would welcome a victorious king after a battle. Word would be sent to the city telling its inhabitants that the king was returning and crowds would gather and welcome the king in. Second, the shouts of the crowds were significant. "Hosanna", when translated means, "save us". They likely were hoping to be saved from Roman occupation. Third, the shouts of the crowds were the shouts of anticipation of the promised Old Testament King. This king was to be a descendant of David who would rule on David's throne forever. Fourth, the waving palm branches were also dangerous symbol. A few hundred years before the Roman occupation, Judea was an independent state governed by the religious leaders and living under the laws of Moses. The symbol of this state? Palm branches. People were essentially waving flags of independence against the Roman occupation.

Why was Jesus doing this? What was Jesus trying to communicate? The Gospel writers didn't just tell us what happened. They were also telling us what these things meant. Jesus was acknowledging that he is the Messiah. If he wanted to deny this message he could have. But instead of going quietly into Jerusalem, he went in a way to fulfill prophecy. When the crowds praised him, he received it. Jesus was declaring himself to be King.

But Jesus wasn't here to overthrow the Romans. He wasn't going to be the Messiah the crowds wanted. He was going to be the Messiah the world needed. He was not coming to establish an earthly kingdom here on earth yet. He was going to establish the kingdom of God first in people's hearts. He was not going to save the Jews from the Romans. He was going to save the world from their sins. He was not going to wear a crown of gold, but to wear a crown of thorns. Instead of conquering the world with vast armies, the king was going to be humiliated and die on a cross to save his people.

Questions for Meditation:

1. What does it mean for you when you call Jesus your king?
2. What comfort does it bring you knowing that Jesus is your king who died for you?
3. Are there times that you may think God should do things differently than what you see now? Are there expectations that you have about how God should do things?

Day 2: Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Read Matthew 21:12-22

The day after Jesus entered Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple courts. What we read next surprises some. Far from the Jesus portrayed in paintings of being a quiet, blond-haired, blue eyed, person who holds baby lambs, Jesus is described here with anger and fire in his eyes. Upon going to the temple Jesus sees money changers and people selling animals for sacrifice. Matthew tells us he drives the merchants away and overthrows the tables. As he does this, Jesus quotes two passages from the Old Testament: “It is written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it into, ‘a den of robbers’”. Instead of the temple being a place designated for people to draw close to God, it has become a place of commerce where merchants take advantage of people and money is to be made.

Matthew tells us that after Jesus cleared out the temple, the blind and the lame came to Jesus to be healed. While Jesus was healing people, the Chief Priests and Scribes came to Jesus in a confrontational mood. Didn't Jesus hear what the crowds were saying? Shouldn't he be stopping this? But Jesus not only acknowledged the praise, but told the temple leaders that the crowds were right to praise him.

The next day, Jesus was walking back to the city when he saw a fig tree. Seeing no fruit, Jesus cursed the tree and it withered. After marveling at what happened, the disciples asked him how the fig tree was able to wither so quickly. Jesus used the fig tree to teach his disciples about how to pray with faith.

What do these stories have to do with each other? At first, they seem like independent stories that don't have anything to do with each other. But there is one theme that brings these incidents together: Intimacy with God.

In the temple, we see Jesus' act fiercely and strongly. His actions were angry and loud. He overthrew tables and chased people out of the temple. Why? The Gospel of John tells us that his disciples remembered a Psalm where the writer tells about how zeal and passion for God motivated the writer to protect God's house. Jesus' own words showed us that the temple was meant to be a place where people would be able to pray and draw close to God. When it was used wrongly, Jesus demonstrated his righteous anger because the markets kept people from drawing close to God.

According to the laws of Moses, a person who is not whole was not permitted to the temple. This meant that those who were lame, or blind or leprous was not allowed to worship God at the temple. After clearing the temple, Jesus healed and restored people. Again, we see God not only healing people, but restoring intimacy with his people.

Lastly, we see Jesus teaching his disciples to pray boldly. How can the disciples pray with such boldness as to pray for fig trees to wither or mountains to be moved? The reason for this is again, intimacy with God. In Jesus teaching his disciples to pray boldly, this was not because the disciples could somehow channel the power of the universe within themselves. This was because they had an intimate relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ.

Rev. Timothy Keller gives a great illustration to explain this idea. Would you have the boldness or the nerve to wake a King up at 3:00 in the morning to ask for a glass of water? Most would not have the nerve unless they are joking or have some sort of wish to be detained by security. But someone who ought to feel comfortable making this request would be the child of the King. The Good News is this: because of Jesus, believers can have confidence that they have this level of access to God the Father. Because our relationship with God has been made right with God, we can come before God.

Questions for Meditation:

1. How does today's passage show God's zeal for intimacy with his people?
2. How does it make you feel knowing that God pursues a relationship with his people zealously?
3. In what ways does today's passage challenge you to pray with greater trust in the Lord?

Day 3: The Religious Leaders Confront Jesus

Read Matthew 21:23-37, 22:15-46

The tension between Jesus and the Pharisees reach a whole new level during Passion Week. The Apostle John tells us that the Pharisees were concerned that the Romans would be provoked and destroy the country because of Jesus. Jesus' accusations of the Pharisees' hypocrisy, his constant breaking of the Sabbath rules and the ever-increasing number of followers were really starting to get to the religious leaders. It was no longer a matter of just letting agreeing to disagree. To the Pharisees, Jesus was someone dangerous and he needed to be stopped.

Often people reading the Gospels think that the religious leaders were all one group- the Pharisees. But there were actually different groups. One group called the Sadducees believed in a more physical version of Judaism that didn't talk about spirits, angels or the afterlife. They were more concerned about ideas. On the other hand, the Pharisees were more interested in practical. They were more concerned about applying the Old Testament law in the everyday things of life and they were closer to the population. The Scribes were the ones who copied manuscripts and could speak about the teachings of Moses with authority. They were the more bookish folks.

Each of these groups disagreed with one another. But they came together for one purpose. They all thought Jesus was dangerous and needed to be stopped. And so, each group tried to confront Jesus in debate hoping to trip Jesus up.

First, the Chief Priests questioned Jesus authority (Matt. 21:23-27). Jesus asked them where did John the Baptist's authority come from. They were unable to answer and Jesus demonstrated that the Chief Priests did not have any authority because they were more concerned about what people thought of them than about God's authority.

Second, were the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15-22). They asked Jesus if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. If Jesus said yes, then he could be accused of being a Roman sympathizer and lose some of his following. If he said no, then he could be accused of trying to lead a rebellion. Jesus knowing their plan, answered wisely, "Give to Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God's". The crowds marveled at Jesus' answer.

Next, the Sadducees (who didn't believe in the Resurrection) asked a question about the resurrection and what would happen if people married more than one person (Matt. 22:23-33). Jesus came back and told the Sadducees were wrong, "because you neither know the Scriptures nor the

power of God (22:29)." People will no longer give or be given in marriage. The Bible also talks about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as if they are still alive.

Lastly, an expert in the law asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment. Jesus answered to love God and to love one's neighbor (Matt. 22:34-40).

When it came to Jesus' turn to ask, Jesus asked how could the Messiah be a descendant of David and also David's lord (Matt. 22:41-45)? No one was able to answer or say a word.

What do we learn about Jesus from this passage? Clearly Jesus was someone wise, a good debater, and learned in the Scriptures. But there was more to this. Jesus was not only a good and wise teacher, trained in rhetoric and quick with words. Jesus had an insight and an authority to his teaching that was not of human origin. If it was, he would cite other people, or have been intimidated by the crowds. Jesus' insight into the Scriptures was because he was part of the Trinity. Jesus was intimately familiar with the main author- the Holy Spirit. Jesus had wisdom because he is God. By contrast, the teachers of the law demonstrated their fear of the crowds, the limited of their logic, misunderstanding of passages and inability to understand God. Jesus' ability to challenge and question them was because he knew what was in people's hearts and could expose them.

The religious leaders would not take Jesus' victory well. They will carry out their plan to try and kill Jesus. And they will do it with help from inside Jesus' inner circle.

Questions for Meditation:

1. What was the tone of the religious leader's questions? Have you ever been asked questions like this with that kind of tone? Have you ever asked questions in this tone? What does it reveal about the state of your heart when you ask questions with a testing tone?
2. After Jesus answered the questions, do you think the religious leaders were satisfied and put their faith in Jesus? Does faith necessarily come when a person's questions are answered?
3. Do you feel inadequate sometimes to answer other people's doubts and questions? How does the passage help you when trying to share the gospel?

Day 4: Judas' Betrayal

Read Matthew 26:1-5; 14-16; John 13:21-30

Meals are very important social events. I have observed several cultures and in many cultures around the world, sitting with someone and having a meal together symbolizes peace, friendship and safety. This is why when people go to a cafeteria, they try to find a group of people they feel comfortable with. We are looking for a place where we can safely eat together.

In today's passage, we have read about Judas' betrayal. The Greek word for betray means to "hand over to a person's enemies". If a person was caught by one's enemies while doing nothing is one thing. Even if a person was caught by the enemy while fleeing is bad, but not personal. But if you were being handed over to your enemies by someone who was an intimate friend would be an especially painful experience. Intimacy requires trust and a faith that the person you are in a relationship will not harm you. It's an especially vulnerable experience because to be friends with someone, you would have to lower your guard with them in order to be friends. That's part of the definition of a friend. Someone you trust.

Judas was not a stranger to Jesus or the other disciples. He was one of the twelve disciples. About three years earlier, Jesus had spent a whole night in prayer to discern who would be part of his inner circle. The next morning, when Jesus appointed the twelve disciples, Judas was listed right there with the rest of them. Judas had the privilege to spend every day with the Master for three years. But in the end, though Judas was physically with Jesus, Judas' heart was not.

The different Gospels portray Judas as a man who was motivated by a desire for money. The Pharisees were happy that they had an inside person who could help arrange it so that Jesus could be arrested quietly and without drawing much attention to himself. And so, Judas agreed to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver- not a lot of money.

The night of the Passover, Jesus and the disciples had their Last Supper together. The Apostle John tells us that Jesus knew that he was going to be betrayed and crucified soon. As a demonstration of his love for his disciples, Jesus washed their feet. This was a task normally reserved for the lowliest of servants. In an act of humble love, John tells us that Jesus loved his disciples to the end. Judas was among those whose feet were washed.

After this act of love, Jesus tells the group that one of them will betray him. He indicates that it is Judas by giving Judas a piece of bread

dipped in wine. The significance of this act was not to say that the piece of bread was magical or had some sort of power. But it was simply to show the intimate relationship Jesus had with Judas. In spite of Jesus' love, Judas was going to make his own choice to go into the darkness.

Often when people think of Jesus' suffering, they mainly focus on Jesus' physical suffering. But Christ's suffering was not just limited to the physical. Those of us who know what it is like to pour your heart into someone only to have them betray you understand the sting and the pain. It almost feels as if you could never be vulnerable to another human being again. But with Christ we must remember that his suffering was unique. Jesus' suffering was for us. Jesus knew he was going to be betrayed. He knew that the Father was going to use Judas' betrayal as the way he would go to the cross. But Christ willingly obeyed the Father's will. In the midst of this, Jesus didn't lash out. He didn't run away. He faced the pain and the hurt. He kept the goal in mind. He did this in order to be our savior.

Questions for Meditation:

1. Have you ever experienced being betrayed? What was it like?
2. How does it make you feel knowing that Christ knows what it is like to be betrayed?
3. How can we see the power of God to be able to use suffering and the betrayal of Jesus for our good? What does this say about the suffering we face while living life?

Day 5: The Lord's Supper

Read Matthew 26:26-29

Imagine if you were to watch a scene of a movie that you haven't seen before. The one scene you see is somewhere in the middle. What would it be like? Would the movie make sense? Perhaps it's the climax of the movie and you see the audience having a strong reaction to the story. Would you understand why? It's likely you would be lost. For many, when we talk about the Last Supper, people may have thoughts about DaVinci's painting or Holy Communion. But in order to understand the Lord's Supper, we have to see it in the context of history.

The Bible can be understood as not only a series of small little stories, but also one big story. It's sometimes called by theologians, "The History of Redemption". It's the history of how God has saved and rescued us. The Lord's Supper (sometimes known as Communion or Eucharist) has connections to the past, connections to Jesus' time and to the future when Christ comes back and restores all things.

When we look at the past, we see that Jesus was connecting the Lord's supper with the story of Israel. It wasn't an accident that the meal happened during Passover. Jesus was connecting what was happening with Israel's rescue from slavery in Egypt in the story of Exodus. Several plagues had devastated Egypt and God promised one more plague. This was the death of the firstborn son. The Israelites were told to take the blood of a sacrificed lamb and paint the blood over the doorpost. When the plague hit, those who were in a home where the blood was painted were spared. Families that were not in a painted home, suffered the loss of the firstborn sons. This was the night where Israel was set free and became a nation.

Jesus was saying in effect to his disciples that God was starting a new promise or covenant with humanity through what Jesus was going to do that night. Like the Israelites who were set free from bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt, believers will be set free from the powers of sin and Satan. Jesus is beginning a new Kingdom that includes both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). Instead of a lamb, Jesus would be the one who will have his body broken and his blood spilt so that those who trust in him would be safe.

When considering Jesus and the disciple's present state of things, the Last Supper was meant to point to the cross. It was meant to point to what Jesus willingly did by his sacrifice on the cross. One of the big disagreements Protestants have with our Catholic friends is the nature of

Communion. The Catholic church has long taught that the bread and the wine really become the actual body and blood of Christ. One of the problems that has resulted is that there has become a focus on the Communion itself. But to focus on the communion is to miss the point. It is like a person standing and taking a picture at a sign to a destination but not going to the destination itself. The communion is meant to point to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus' act of saving and redeeming us is what saves us and makes us holy, not the communion itself. When Jesus said, "this is my body" and "this is my blood of the new covenant", his disciples were not confused. They understood Jesus meant it symbolically.

But there's a third thing about the Lord's Supper we're supposed to understand. It's supposed to point to a guarantee that those who believe in Jesus will one day sit with Jesus in a new and transformed world. Like a wedding feast, God's people will be the bride, and Jesus will be the groom. Sin and death will be no more. Jesus mentions this when he says that he will not drink again of the fruit of the vine, "until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Mt. 26:29)."

The Last Supper reminds us that we serve a faithful God. God keeps His promises (covenant). He is the same God who was faithful to the Israelites of Old. He is the same God who died on the cross and was raised again from the dead. He is the same God who promises to make all things new again. In this season, of Lent as Easter approaches let us remember that we serve a God who has, is and will be faithful to us.

Questions for Meditation:

1. As we think about the past, we can see how God wasn't under the control of God's people, but God was faithful nonetheless. How does this make you feel knowing that God is not under your control but graciously promises to be faithful?
2. As we consider how the communion points us to Christ, how does the cross remind you that God is faithful to forgive your sins and continues to love you?
3. As you think about the future promise of communion, how does having an eternal hope encourage you today?
4. What were some attitudes you had as you came to communion before in the past? Were you indifferent? Distracted? Focused?

Day 6: The Garden of Gethsemane

Read Matthew 26:36-46

After Supper ended, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane as was the usual practice of Jesus and the Disciples. Jesus told his disciples to sit and wait while he asked his closest disciples to pray with him. Jesus told them his soul was sorrowful to death and he asked them to watch or keep awake while he went to pray. Perhaps because of the meal and the time of the night, the disciples found themselves weary and soon fell asleep.

We're told that Jesus prayed that if it was possible that the cup would pass from him. If we read the request quickly, we can forget the seriousness of Jesus' prayer if God the Father had listened to him. The cup represented Jesus' suffering. Imagine a cup of poison that represented death and God's wrath. As a human, of course Jesus would not want that. This was not a pleasant experience. But Jesus prayed, "not as I will, but as your will."

Returning to his disciples, he found them sleeping. Jesus rebukes the disciples and asks Peter, "couldn't you keep watch with me for one hour?" Jesus warns Peter to pray that he will not enter into temptation. Although Peter loved Jesus and told him he was willing to die for Jesus, Peter will find out the limits of his own power. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus returns a second time to prayer. This time with courage. "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Unfortunately, when Jesus returns to his disciples, they were sleeping again. In the moment of crisis, Jesus' disciples were asleep. A third time, Jesus goes and prays. But the time has come. Jesus returns to his disciples one last time and tells them to sleep later. Jesus was going to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

We see a few things from today's passage. First, we see Jesus' real struggle with obeying the Father's will. Often people erroneously say that Jesus got out of temptation because he was God. But Scripture affirms over and over again that Jesus was fully human as well. His pain was real. He had a real body that could feel pain and could die. Jesus too had to learn what it meant to trust God the Father. He prayed as anyone who has suffered has prayed, "please get me out of this situation." But in the end, he trusted God the Father and obeyed.

Second, we see Jesus praying if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. In other words, if there was another way to redeem sinners, let this suffering not happen. But there was no other way. God's just

punishment for sin required a cost. God could not simply forgive. This would make God an unrighteous judge. Either Jesus would take the cost of our sin, or we would. No one could take the punishment of God and live. And so, as the second person in the Trinity, Jesus willingly became cut off from the Father. He took the wrath that we deserved and by doing so, opened up a way so we can be made right with God once again. There was no other way. We cannot trust in our own ability to fight sin or to be faithful to God. We need Jesus to do that for us.

Third we see Christ's faithfulness and his disciple's failures. It is said that the only true hero in the Gospel is Jesus. Peter, the first leader of the church was known for his serious failures. If the church wanted to have a cover up, they wouldn't have had their first leader be portrayed as such a failure. But Peter knew that the only one who was truly faithful was Jesus. Jesus fought Peter's spiritual battle while Peter was asleep. Jesus loved and cared for Peter when Peter would later deny knowing Jesus three times.

Jesus prayed, "not as I will, but as you will". He prayed, "your will be done". Even the best of us struggle with this prayer. Jesus was the one who was faithful. Jesus' faithfulness to death on a cross was the way that God would use to take the curse and punishment of our sins upon himself. Let us find comfort knowing that while we were unfaithful, we have a Savior who was faithful for us.

Questions for Meditation:

1. How do we see Jesus' humanity (humanness)? How do we see Jesus' divinity (Godness) in today's passage?
2. How does seeing that Jesus was faithful while the disciples were faithless encourage you in your failures?
3. How do Jesus' words "not as I will, but as you will" bring you comfort?