



# ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

A HOLY WEEK  
DEVOTIONAL

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 **FIRST FREE CHURCH**

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# INTRODUCTION

It's a frightful endeavor, to set out to write anything meaningful about the life of the Son of God during the week between Palm Sunday and Easter. What more is there to say, that's not already been said? But maybe what we need is not necessarily more words or knowledge on the subject, but encouragement to examine the story of Scripture as it plays out that week and a reminder to reorient our lives around what is true. What is good. What is holy. What is astonishingly costly. What increases our love for God (1 Cor. 8:2-3).

We need to reorient ourselves around the cross.

So that is what we'll seek to do. We will look at several different encounters Jesus had with people, and we'll be reminded that what plays out on the pages in front of us each day took place at a specific time in history, amongst a specific group of people, for a specific and indescribably glorious reason. But their impact was not just for those people at that time. We'll look at how Jesus' encounters during Holy Week can remind us of the entire story of Scripture, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and him crucified (2 Cor. 2:2).

One thing to remember about the Biblical writers is that they were humans, in a specific culture, at a set point in time. Each wrote with a different personality, style, and purpose. Middle Eastern cultures were not necessarily interested in a chronological, detailed account of events that would give us a replay of their daily agenda. Therefore, we can't come to Scripture expecting a scientific logbook. If you read through the four different gospel accounts written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you will find their accounts of events vary slightly. This doesn't mean we should be suspicious of their writing. It means we need to be discerning readers and pay attention to where they are pointing us. Each writer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the things he did, in the way he did, for a reason. And each account agrees that all the events of Jesus' life and ministry culminate into the deafening crescendo of his death on the cross.

Therefore, we won't expect a perfect chronological account, but we will look at how Jesus met people that week, knowing his journey to the cross was coming to an end. Many of these encounters will recall different images used throughout Scripture which find

their fulfillment in Jesus, and we'll pray for ears to hear and hearts to understand what this means for us as a church today.

Finally, because Lent is traditionally a time of confession and repentance, we'll include a daily prayer of congregational confession that we can pray together, despite our physical absence from each other during the week.

# DAY ONE:

## Read John 11

We begin the same way our journey will end, with a resurrection. But, as a forewarning, we won't spend the week basking in triumphant glory, as we might be tempted to do. As we attempt to encounter the suffering servant written about in Isaiah 53, we would do well to remember *this* is the divine man to whom we pledge our allegiance. "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him" (Isaiah 53:3).

We have the benefit of knowing the triumphant ending, but all too often that means we desire to skip over the very uncomfortable suffering which makes the glorious ending so magnificent. Therefore, let's slow down this week and befriend the grief that turns our hearts to the one who is well acquainted with heartache, shame, and suffering so that we might know and love him more.

When John wrote his account of Jesus' life and ministry, he told us the reason why he was writing all this down. John 20:31 says "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The two words "so that" are very important as we begin our journey. Nothing that happens with God is without a "so that..." Nothing is on accident, or without a purpose. Ultimately, to give away the ending, Lazarus died and was brought back to life for a pretty big "so that," that has less to do with Lazarus, and everything to do with Jesus' death and resurrection.

When Jesus heard that his friend was sick, he intentionally stayed away two days longer, "so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). He did not act as we'd expect him to, considering his friend was gravely ill. He intentionally waited for Lazarus to die, while Mary and Martha knew full well Jesus could have come and healed him. He'd done it plenty of times before with others who were near death. They knew he had the power. But *he waited*. Jesus' disciples didn't know what was coming, but Jesus did. He knew what events the death of his friend, Lazarus, would set into motion. He needed to let them see, yet again, that

he did indeed have power over death because a more important death was coming, and he needed them to have faith.

## Martha's encounter

Despite almost being stoned the last time Jesus was in Jerusalem, he now returned, to begin the ultimate finale of his ministry on earth. Each of Jesus' encounters because of Lazarus' death is intentional. When Jesus got to Bethany, where Mary and Martha lived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Mary remained where she was, but Martha went out to meet Jesus on the road, and in her grief, she confronted him.

When Jesus used the "I AM" statement (John 11:25), he was using the same phrase that the God that all Jews worshipped; used when he met Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3). So when Jesus used an "I AM" statement, the Jews were confronted with who Jesus was claiming to be. They understood in a way that might be lost on us that he was claiming *to be God*. But to them, he was every bit a man, and he was poor. They had been waiting and hoping for a conquering king. Someone to remove the political oppression they'd been suffering under Rome (and so many others before.) So whenever Jesus said "I AM," those encounters usually ended in one of two ways. They often ended with Jews trying to stone him, (like what had happened last time he was in Judea), or they ended with how Martha responded when he asked her "Do you believe this?"

We have the rest of the story confirming for us that Jesus was who he said he was, but Martha had to weigh what she'd seen, observed, and heard about this man, and make a decision while looking him in the eyes.

Martha answered. Have you? This question can't be left unanswered in your lifetime.

## Mary's Encounter

Mary met Jesus with unrestrained emotion. She fell at his feet and cried the same thing her sister did. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died!" (John 11:32). But Jesus responded differently to Mary. He met her grief with his own. He wept. Knowing it would soon be made right did not change the despair that death consistently brings. The world was not as it was supposed

to be. It was not as he'd created it to be. Jesus' friends were heart-broken, and therefore, so was he.

## The Crowd's Encounter at the Tomb

When Jesus got to the tomb and ordered the stone to be rolled away, he prayed. "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, *so that* they may believe that you sent me." It was a Jewish custom to not let a grieving family mourn alone, and there were many gathered with the sisters as they mourned their dead brother. This crowd was important. They followed Mary to Jesus, witnessed Jesus call out to Lazarus, and then saw Lazarus walk out of the tomb, bound in his burial clothes, but very much alive.

*Thus begins the end.*

The resurrection of Lazarus set into motion the plot to finally arrest and get rid of Jesus once and for all (John 11:45-49). Not because the religious elite understood that the Son of God had come to die as a sacrifice for all, but because they desired to hold onto their religious power, and he was a threat to their perceived authority. But God seems to use even the vilest of motives for his good purposes, doesn't he?

In their grief, Martha encountered Jesus' divinity. Mary encountered his genuine compassion. In Lazarus' death, the disciples and crowds saw Jesus overcome death yet again so that they might believe when Jesus raised himself from the dead.

We will spend plenty of time looking at the suffering of Jesus this week but will not lose sight of the fact that Jesus has power over death and takes away the ultimate pain of a life separated from God. He is also fully compassionate and is doing everything in our lives so that we might know and love him more.



# PRAYER AND REFLECTION

**Father God,** because of your infinite love we come before your throne of Grace. You know the sins of our hearts that are hidden from others and the unforgiving attitudes we may hold toward those whose sins SEEM greater than our own. Forgive us Lord we pray and give us the mind of Christ to forgive each other just as you have so graciously forgiven each of us. In the precious name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

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*Written by Lois Ediger*

## WATCH

**Always Good**

*By Andrew Peterson*



# DAY TWO:

## PALM SUNDAY

### Read 1 Samuel 12

Everything God did for the Israelite people had been to set them apart from other nations, to distinguish their God from the gods every other nation fruitlessly served. He wanted his people to be a nation that would shine like a light into the darkness so that the world would know who the one true God was and would come to him. But power and protection seem to be impossible impulses to reject in the human heart. And the Israelites wanted a king. They didn't just want to continue to commune with God and obey him and live under his protection and care. They wanted to be like the other nations that continued to threaten their safety. Everyone else had a king. They wanted one too.

God's people were rejecting him (1 Sam. 8:7) in favor of the perceived power of the world. God warned the people through his prophet Samuel that an earthly king would come with a cost. Whereas God had promised to lead them by his infinite divine power, providing all they needed as a nation and only asking for their obedience in return, an earthly king would take whatever he needed from them to fund his royal position. They wanted peace as the world considers it, and they were determined to have it.

Samuel gave his final speech to the Israelite people in 1 Samuel 12, giving them their earthly king. He was grieved to do so because he knew full well the ramifications they would endure as a result of their desires. The wheat harvest was at hand, which meant that there should have been no more thunder or rain (CSB study notes pg. 355), yet it thundered and rained as a sign of God's displeasure with them. And yet, for better or worse, God provided king after king to rule over the Israelite people. He even renewed the covenant he'd made with Abraham with David and then Solomon, affirming that one day, a true King would reign over Israel, and also the world.

It was *this* King that the Israelites continued to long for. Despite God's clear instructions to continue to obey him, they were entirely unable to keep their portion of God's covenant. Therefore, their earthly kings had not provided them the eternal security they'd been desperate for and they continually looked forward to the day

when they'd be released from their political oppressors and finally have "peace."

I imagine as Jesus approached the city that last time and looked out over Jerusalem all those hundreds of years later, he remembered his people asking for a king. They were desiring peace for themselves among the nations but refused to listen when God promised to lead them. Knowing that one day he'd come, and enter the city as a King, not ruling with military power and prowess, but sitting humbly on a donkey.

And he wept.

He wept over his people, gathering by the thousands in their holy city to celebrate the coming Passover, saying "if you knew this day what would bring peace..." (Luke 19:41). Destruction was still coming for them, "because you did not recognize the time when God visited you" (vs. 44). He entered the city to shouts of praise and acclamation; their king had finally arrived. But once again, the king they wanted and the King that Jesus was, were two opposite entities. And they didn't have eyes to see.

## **Read John 12:9-50 // The Crowds' Encounter**

What we know and celebrate as Palm Sunday is recorded in all four of the gospel accounts in our New Testament. We would do well to pay attention, even though their descriptions of the event might differ slightly. In John's description of events, Mary had just anointed Jesus' feet, and there were now many believing that Jesus was the Messiah because he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Crowds were gathering for the celebration of the Passover, and word of Lazarus' resurrection had spread like wildfire among them.

While Jesus had sought to keep his presence and miracles somewhat of a secret before this (John 6:15), today he entered the city of Jerusalem allowing the crowds to worship him as their king. They cried out a portion of Psalm 118:26-27 over him, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord..." crying out what was normally sung over other pilgrims who would come to the temple. The Christian Standard Bible translates those verses "Lord, save us! Lord, please grant us success! He who comes in the name of the Lord is blessed. From the house of the Lord, we bless you. The Lord is God and has given us light. Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar" (Ps. 118:25-27, CSB).

How little they knew, as they cried out over their King, that he approached the house of the Lord not to make a sacrifice as they had done, but *to become* the sacrifice. In a departure from the normal pilgrimage welcome, these crowds added “the King of Israel!” to their shouts of praise, and this time Jesus didn’t dissuade them. In Luke’s version of this encounter, he included that some of the Pharisees begged Jesus to silence them, and Jesus responded, “I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40). His time to be crowned King of Israel had come, and it was time for everyone to know. But he wouldn’t wear a crown of honor and worldly glory.

John also tells us that Jesus didn’t just come to be crowned King of the Jews. Some Greeks had come to also observe the Passover and requested to see Jesus for themselves, and this interaction caused Jesus to say “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit” (John 12:23). In a nod of remembrance to when the Israelites had first asked for a king at the time of the wheat harvest and God sent rain and thunder upon them (1 Sam. 12), the time for the wheat harvest was here again, this time figuratively, and once again thunder was heard.

In the sight of the crowds of Jews and Greeks, Jesus prayed that God would glorify his name, “Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus responded, ‘This voice came, not for me, but for you. Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out.’” (John 12:28-31). As their true King, Jesus would be the seed of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, producing a harvest that would cover the whole world. “As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32).

The disciples and the crowds that followed him had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. They were convinced that the time for their King had finally arrived, and they welcomed him to Jerusalem with shouts of praise and acclamation. Jesus allowed them to worship him but did so knowing the peace they sought through their King would not be the kind of peace he’d bring. He brought peace that comes through death on behalf of those who are not worthy.

He wouldn’t be the king they wanted, but he was, indeed, the very King we all need.

# PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

**Our Father in heaven,** we come before you with grateful and humble hearts. Understanding that the God of the universe not only sees us but loves us is a rich and wonderful mystery, sometimes difficult for us to believe. Gracious Father, today we confess our secret sins, those sins that are tucked away in our minds. These are untrue thoughts that support lies about ourselves, others and you. These thoughts are not secret to you. Jesus, we know that you overcame the great deceiver on the cross and we can claim that power to overcome our enemy as well. We can “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Holy Spirit, we acknowledge your presence inside of us and confess our sin of trying to live on our own strength and power. We are so foolish! Spirit, convict us and remind us of the truth of who we are in Christ. We pray this in the beautiful name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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*Written by: Meribeth Tenney*

## WATCH

### **How Deep the Father's Love for Us**

*By Austin Stone Worship*



# DAY THREE:

## MONDAY

Before Israel ever had a king for themselves, before they even had land for themselves, God's presence dwelled with them wherever they went. He met with Moses on Mt. Sinai, and eventually, he instructed his people to build a tabernacle where he could dwell with them. This tabernacle could be moved and brought with them as they traversed the wilderness, and it would be the place where they would offer the sacrifices he commanded and atone for their sin wherever they went.

Eventually, once Israel had a king, King David desired to build God a temple. A more permanent structure where the Jews could come and worship. In 2 Samuel 7:11-16, we see that God did not want David to build him a house, but God renewed his covenant with his people through David yet again. From David would come a king whose kingdom would reign forever. This descendant will build the house for God, and God will establish his kingdom forever.

David's son, Solomon is the first answer to this promise. Solomon set out to build a glorious temple for God's presence to dwell in. It was to be a place that reminded God's people of the Garden, the original meeting place between God and humans. 1 Kings 9:1-9 tells us what happened when the temple was finished. God appeared to Solomon and affirmed that he would bless this temple but reminded Solomon that if he or his sons turned away from obeying God, judgment was certain.

And it wasn't long before judgment was doled out. Solomon couldn't have been the king God had said would reign forever because it didn't take him long to add in plenty of other gods to worship. Then, the kingdom was divided, and eventually, the entire nation was exiled out of their promised land, away from the temple. This temple that Solomon had built was destroyed. It seemed hopeless for God's people.

It was in this context of exiled judgment that Isaiah prophesied:

"This is what the Lord says: Preserve justice and do what is right, for my salvation is coming soon, and my righteousness will be revealed. Happy is the person who does this, the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

No foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord should say, 'The Lord will exclude me from his people,' and the eunuch should not say,

‘Look, I am a dried-up tree.’ For the Lord says this: ‘For the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold firmly to my covenant, I will give them, in my house and within my walls, a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give each of them an everlasting name that will never be cut off. As for the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to become his servants—all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold firmly to my covenant—I will bring them to my holy mountain and let them rejoice in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.’ This is the declaration of the Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel: ‘I will gather to them still others besides those already gathered’” (Isaiah 56:1-8).

God’s presence and covenant were to be offered to all. Those who would follow and obey him, particularly by keeping the Sabbath which distinctly set the Israelites apart among whom they were exiled as well as the nations around them, were welcomed in God’s presence. They didn’t have a temple, but they still were to orient their weekly rhythms around the Sabbath day and to keep it holy. And to those who might be considered second class, the eunuchs and the foreigners, God said, “I will give them a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.” God’s heart was for the world, and he desired to use the nation of Israel to draw many to himself and welcome them into his presence.

## **Those in the temple encounter Jesus: Read Matthew 21:12-17**

The day after Jesus was welcomed to Jerusalem as the King of the Jews, he went to the temple and what he found caused him great distress. He was brought face to face with the corruption that was taking place at the expense of the foreigner who traveled to observe the sacrifices at the temple. Those who came from far away (including non-Jewish foreigners) would need to exchange their money for the temple currency, which was the only currency accepted by the people selling the items they would need for the sacrifices.

Unfortunately, those exchanging the money and selling the goods were taking advantage of foreigners. They were dealing unfairly with them, and this enraged Jesus. As he drove them out, flipping tables in his anger, he cried out “It is written, my house will be called a house of

prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves!” (Matthew 21:13, quoting Isaiah 56:67 and Jeremiah 7:11). Jesus knew the temple should be a place where the foreigner was cared for, welcomed in, and given honor as he sought to worship God. Yet this temple had become the home to greed and nationalistic pride as they took advantage of the foreigner.

He cleared out the temple, and then we see a picture of what the temple was supposed to be. The blind, the lame, and even children entered. Those with the least in terms of status were finally welcomed in. Those with broken bodies were healed. The children, in the exuberance that seems to be reserved solely for the very young and uninhibited, shouted “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Maybe they were just echoing what they’d heard the throngs crying out the day before, but they also witnessed this man from Nazareth healing those who were not welcome because of their brokenness. With Jesus there in the temple, in the very presence of God, they found honor in his sight, and they praised him for it.

But Jesus did not just clear out evil from that one building. He came to make all things new, including the idea of the temple and where and who could enter God’s presence. John described a similar incident in his account, where Jesus said “‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.’ Therefore, the Jews said, ‘This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking about the temple of his body” (John 2:20-21).

If the temple was supposed to represent the place where God’s presence dwelled among his people, Jesus is the true and better temple. Because through him, people encountered the very presence of God face to face. And through his death and resurrection, we also find ourselves welcomed into the presence of God. “So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Not only is Jesus the temple where one can meet with God, but he is also making us, as his followers, once foreigners and strangers, into a “temple” that can display God’s presence on earth now. We are the new place where God’s presence dwells, united together in Jesus.



# PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

**Oh, Heavenly Father,** we praise you for your sovereignty, grace, mercy and love. You alone are worthy of our trust and our worship. Forgive us for the gods we put before you in our lives, those things we chase, those things to which we cling and depend on to bring us satisfaction and joy. We ask that your Holy Spirit would reveal those idols to us and lead us to repentance. We are humbled at the marvelous gift of your son, Jesus, whose life, death and resurrection provide forgiveness and hope. We acknowledge that we need the powerful enablement of your Holy Spirit each moment to be satisfied and to find joy in you alone.

Now to You, Lord, be honor, glory and praise!

*Written By: Mark and Joyce Dunham*

## WATCH



**The Temple**

*By The Bible Project*



**Wood and Nails**

*By The Porter's Gate*



# DAY FOUR:

## TUESDAY

The word “Priest” can bring up all sorts of feelings, memories, or ideas in Christian circles today. Let’s do our best to suspend our understanding of that word in our cultural context and look at what a Priest was to both the Ancient Israelite people as well as what it would have meant in Jesus’ time.

Leviticus 16 gives us the story behind the Day of Atonement for the Israelites. The Priest, now Aaron and his sons, were anointed, consecrated, and ready for service to God on behalf of the Israelite people. (For even more context, particularly on being anointed, feel free to read Leviticus 8-9 as well). This was the beginning of the nation of Israel being established after being released from generations of slavery to the Egyptians.

Their religious practices (as well as everything else in their lives) were to set them apart from all the nations around them to show everyone else who their God was. Earlier, God had told Moses “Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6). The entire nation was to perform the role of priest, mediating between their God and the nations around them.

Leviticus 16 records the instructions for the annual ceremony to be performed by the high priest (Aaron as the first) that would atone for his sins, and then the sins of the entire people of Israel. He could not approach the holy place behind the curtain of the tabernacle whenever he wanted, or he would die from entering God’s presence unprepared. So once a year he would carefully wash his body, dress in humble linen garments, and prepare various offerings.

First, he needed to atone for his sin and that of his household. Eventually, he would take two goats and one would be sacrificed to the Lord as a sin offering. Then he would confess the sins of the entire nation over the other goat and send it away into the wilderness. This goat symbolically bore the sins of the nation and would die alone in a desolate place on behalf of their sin.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary says of this day, “Though other cultures of the ancient Near East have rituals to dispose of evil, in all of those the evil is of a ritual or demonic nature, while in Israel the sins of the people are included. The ceremony begins with purification offerings so that the priest can enter the holy place. Once inside, the blood ritual cleanses all parts of the sanctuary from the impurities accumulated throughout the year. It works from the inside out until the sins are placed on the head of the ‘scapegoat,’ which carries them away. The goal of the regular purification offerings was forgiveness. In contrast, this annual ritual is intended to dispose of the sins of the people.” (pg. 131).

The priest stood on behalf of the people, purified the place where God’s presence dwelled among them, confessed their sin, placed it on the scapegoat, and offered sacrifices to dispose of the sin of the people for that year. But it couldn’t take them away permanently and would need to be repeated annually in perpetuity.

Or at least until a humble man named Jesus from Nazareth entered the scene claiming to be God.

## **Jesus Encounters the Woman**

Variations of this story appear in all four gospel accounts. It could be that it happened more than once since the characters are different. Or it could be that the different authors wished to emphasize different aspects of the encounter. For instance, John placed an anointing the day before Jesus entered Jerusalem, being heralded as King. Both kings and priests were anointed before their service in the Old Testament, therefore John may have been signifying the anointing of Jesus as King before he entered the holy city. (They can each be read here: Matthew 26:6-10, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-8)

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all place their accounts closer to the Passover celebration, which became Jesus’ final meal before his death. In two of these accounts, Jesus said she was anointing his body for his burial, which he knew was imminent. I imagine there’s a sort of holy heaviness surrounding Jesus by now. Every encounter, every meal, and every night brought him incrementally closer to not just his death, but the incredible pain, suffering, and shame he would endure on behalf of those he interacted with as well as everyone else in the history of the world.

## Read Luke 7:36-50

In Luke's version, Jesus was invited as a dinner guest to a Simon the Pharisee's house. Pharisees were known for keeping the law, including avoidance of any impropriety or association with those who would be considered sinners. A woman heard Jesus was there. But not just any woman, a woman whom the whole town had known was a sinner. The very person Simon would have avoided at all costs, entered his dinner party uninvited.

Jesus was often polarizing. Here, a Pharisee known for his morality was set opposite a woman of well-known immoral status, and in between was Jesus. As she let down her hair, washed, and anointed Jesus' feet, Simon questioned whether or not Jesus could possibly be the prophet people thought he was. Based on her well-known status, her actions could have been interpreted somewhat erotically, and Simon thought there was no way Jesus could possibly let her touch him if he knew who she was. The Pharisee expected Jesus to chastise the woman for her impropriety, but ironically, Simon was the one to be chastised.

Jesus reminded Simon that he who has been forgiven much loves much. And this woman had been forgiven much. Jesus welcomed her potentially scandalous actions toward him as her extravagant love for him. And not only that, he placed her actions in direct contrast to Simon's lack of action as the host of the dinner. Simon had failed to wash Jesus' feet, greet him with a kiss of hospitality, or anoint his head with common olive oil. This woman had humbled herself in front of others who were sure to judge her severely and lavishly done all of those things to Jesus' feet, the most unclean part of his body.

In the sight of all at the banquet, Jesus reaffirmed her forgiven status. Acting as a priest, he forgave her sin and said to her "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:50). This shocked everyone at the banquet, and they questioned his ability to forgive sins since that was not the role of just any person. There were rituals to follow for sins to be forgiven, sacrifices to make, and priests to oversee it all.

What the onlookers didn't realize was that the coming Christ (Christ meaning anointed one), would be a new High Priest who takes away the sins of the world and makes all things new.

## Hebrews 10:11-23 says,

“Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. For after he says: This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, the Lord says, I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds, and I will never again remember their sins and their lawless acts. Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus—he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain, that is through his flesh)—and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.”

Whereas Aaron would have died by entering the Holy Place without the proper sacrifice for sins and ceremonial cleansing, we can draw near to God’s presence unafraid, because Jesus is our great High Priest who not only mediates between us and God, he offered himself as the final and perfect sacrifice on behalf of all sins. From the mundane to the most scandalous.

Just as the woman that washed and anointed Jesus’ feet was forgiven and restored, so we too have been forgiven and restored. Let us love lavishly then not only Jesus but those whom Jesus loved.

# PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

**Father God**, we come to you praising you for your steadfast love and faithfulness towards us. We confess that we often do not understand, focus on, or appreciate the depth of the love you have for us. We confess that, instead of recognizing your love and care for us and coming to you for help, we often turn to people or things to satisfy us, comfort us, and guide us. Yet, your love was so great that you sent your own Son, Jesus, to die an agonizing death as a substitute for our sins, and he is now in heaven interceding and pleading for us. And you have generously given us the gift of the Holy Spirit and your Word to teach, guide and comfort us.

We confess that too often we are so focused on our selfish and sinful desires that we do not see the needs of others around us and love them as you would want us to do. Or sometimes we have become so consumed with lesser things that we are unable or unwilling to give of ourselves to others. Teach us to care deeply enough and to leave enough margin in our lives to share your love and mercy with those around us.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*Written by Vera Friesen*

## WATCH



### **The Priest**

*By The Bible Project*



### **Have Mercy on Me**

*By Paul Zach*



# DAY FIVE:

## WEDNESDAY

In our passage today, Jesus addressed the religious elite with some harsh words of truth. And he chastised them for their murderous treatment of all the prophets that had been sent to Israel in the past. So, what exactly was a prophet? As we read yesterday, the priests were to be the ones mediating the covenant between God and the people and offering sacrifices for the sins of the people. But they were also supposed to be the teachers of the law, instructing the people how to live holy lives and obey God, thereby keeping their end of the covenant. Unfortunately, they often gave in to corruption and turned to worship the gods of the nations around them, leading the Israelites not toward, but away from God's care and rule.

It was during these times that God's Spirit would empower a man or woman and have them speak the truth to the people. When the Israelites had forsaken their work of caring for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, a prophet would come forth and remind them of the heart of their God. The prophets were tasked with calling the nation to repentance, to turn back and worship God and only God. But when idolatry has a hold of a human heart, the truth can feel like a serrated knife to the bones. Inevitably, the prophets, God's merciful mouthpieces, were often treated poorly, to say the least. Instead of heeding the call of the prophet to repentance before God enacted judgment upon them, the Israelites sometimes just removed the prophet through any means necessary.

At one point, Elijah himself ran for his life and cried out to God saying "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of Armies, but the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are looking for me to take my life" (1 Kings 19:10). It wasn't a glorious calling, to be a prophet. They were often called into this role out of other jobs. Moses was a shepherd, Deborah was a judge, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests, and Huldah was likely a teacher. While they were serving God faithfully in their jobs, they were called to often speak a hard word to God's people and it was rarely received well.

## Read Matthew 23

Jesus was referred to as many things throughout his life and ministry: teacher, rabbi, and king. He was also considered to be a prophet because of the way he spoke to the people of Israel, reminding them of the need to care for the poor and marginalized. But he didn't just tell them to do these things, he did them himself. His actions as well as words were like a scathing rebuke upon the religious leaders who did none of those things.

In Matthew 23, Jesus called attention to the religious hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. He told the crowds and his disciples that while the scribes and Pharisees may have known the right words and the proper religious teachings, their behavior betrayed what was truly in their hearts. He said they heaped heavy burdens on people, making it difficult, if not impossible, to obey God. All their religious adherence was mere theatrical bravado to get themselves honor and distinction as religious elite.

Just days before he was crucified at the request of the religious leaders, Jesus said to them “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we wouldn’t have taken part with them in shedding the prophets’ blood’” (Matthew 23:29-30). These were some of the very same religious leaders who would kill not just Jesus, but many of his followers as well.

The desire to silence those who point out the error of our ways is strong. When the powerful are called to repentance, it's much easier just to silence the one who calls us out than it is to repent and change direction. The prophets often pointed out systemic issues of corruption and idolatry in their nation and their religious systems, and often they were silenced.

Jesus was acting as the true Prophet here, not just a mouthpiece for God, but God himself, calling out the corruption in the religious system of their day. He not only preached good news to the poor, but he called out the powerful for their lack of obedience to the God they said they served and worshipped.

And they murdered him for it.

At the end of his prophetic speech, Jesus once again lamented over Jerusalem. He spoke tenderly and compassionately, equating himself with a mother hen wanting to protect her children.



But instead of seeking him, they rejected him, and their judgment would come. Jerusalem would be demolished at the hands of the Roman government they had tried so hard to appease.

A prophet's words were never easy to hear. But instead of humbling themselves, turning from their wicked ways, and seeking God, they sent Jesus to his death.

Lord have mercy on us if we ever hear a call to repentance and refuse to listen.

## WATCH

### Hosanna

*By Jon Guerra + Paul Zach*



# PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

**Blessed are you, Lord our God,** King of the universe, who does not withhold mercy and forgiveness from his beloved people! We confess that we don't know ourselves as well as we should. We have thoughts, attitudes, and motives that we can't identify or even make sense of. And they lead us to wander from you and hurt each other. But you, Father, know every single thing about us, even the dark, hidden, complicated things. Yet you do not reject us or leave us to fend for ourselves. By the presence of your Holy Spirit, you are close to us. Give us eyes to see you, know you, and enjoy you so we might truly know ourselves and truly love you and each other. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus. Amen.

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*Written by James Pruch*

# DAY SIX:

## THURSDAY

It wasn't an accident that Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem right now. They had gathered along with thousands of others to celebrate the Passover. This particular feast had been celebrated among the Jewish people for thousands of years, since that fateful night when God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt.

### Read Exodus 12:1-13:16

This was a new beginning for the Israelite people. They'd been enslaved for 400 years, and God told Moses that this was now the first month of the year, because he was going to show his mighty hand to the world. Their calendar would now serve as a permanent reminder of his deliverance and care for his people. At this point, they didn't have a "Bible" to remind them of God's work on their behalf, so all of their lives revolved around being reminded. Starting with the calendar, festivals, then the commandments including the Sabbath, then the tabernacle and sacrifices, etc., all their bodily practices and rituals were meant to disciple them in the way of following their God. "The observance functions like a sign on your hands or a symbol on the middle of your forehead: God brought us out of Egypt with a powerful hand" (Exodus 13:16, The Message).

They were to eat unleavened bread for seven days before the Passover meal. Then the Passover meal itself had instructions regarding what kind of lamb was to be killed and how, and then they were to remain watchful all night (Exodus 12:42) to remember God's angel of death passing over those who were marked by the sacrificed lamb's blood.

### Jesus Encounters the Disciples

When Jesus gathered with his followers to eat his last supper, they were celebrating this festival of remembrance. They were remembering God's deliverance of his people out of slavery and into freedom. Those who were inside homes with doorposts covered with the blood of the sacrificed lamb were spared the devastating judgment of death that awful night.

Just as the original Passover was a new beginning for the Israelite people, this last Passover celebration that Jesus ate with his followers was not just the end of his life on earth, but a new beginning for the whole world. As they ate and then began their all-night vigil in remembrance of God's watching over the Israelites all those years ago, Jesus took the opportunity to show his followers the true way of God's kingdom one last time. John recorded much of what Jesus taught that night.

## Read John 13-17

In contrast to the pious actions of the religious elite, as their “teacher and leader,” he got down on his hands and knees and washed their feet. He assured them if they'd seen him, they'd seen God (John 14:6-7). He told them his time had come, and that “The one who eats my bread has raised his heel against me” (John 13:18). Remember God's promise to Eve way back in Genesis 3:15? Now was the time.

He told them he was leaving but would send the Holy Spirit to help them remember everything he'd told them (John 14:26). And then he promised to give them peace. Remember when he looked out over Jerusalem at the beginning of this week and wept, saying, “If only you knew what would bring you peace”? He promised peace to his followers. “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (John 14:27). He was about to show them his peace came through his very death. He was right to remind them not to be fearful because what was coming was going to shake every ounce of peace they might have thought they possessed.

He spoke at length about love, and the love they were to have for each other and God. It was a self-sacrificing love, as he was about to show them by laying down his life not just for his friends, but for even those who would be performing the ritualistic murder. He warned them the world would not love them, and “In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God” (John 16:2). Oh, what a sobering thought that is! That one might kill followers of Jesus, and even Jesus himself, and think one is offering service to God.

Jesus continually contrasted his way with the way of the world. He told his followers they will weep and mourn, but the world would rejoice. They will be sorrowful, but their sorrow will turn to joy. Before he prayed for himself, his followers, and then all believers, he

told his disciples, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

Knowing his time to die was mere breaths away, Jesus spoke many things to his followers. Other gospels don’t record as much of his teaching that night as John did, but it’s still important to see what they did write about that last Passover celebration.

## **Read Matthew 26:17-30**

Just as the lamb’s blood was spilled and placed as a marker of the covenant between God and the Israelites during that first Passover, now Jesus’ blood would be spilled to form a new covenant. Those who follow Jesus will be marked by his blood, their sins are forgiven for good, and they will be given new life as God’s children.

## **Read Hebrews 10:1-18**

“By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time” (Hebrews 10:10).

Jesus was getting ready to offer his body as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. God himself, taking God’s wrath on our behalf.

“Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Indeed and amen.

# PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

## Father,

Thank you for the promise of Proverbs 3:5-6. It tells us that you will make our paths straight—that you will show us what to do or guide us in a decision.

But we have to trust in you instead of trusting in our own way of doing things or in our abilities and experience. And we have to submit to you. That means we have to give up control over the issue that we are bringing to you.

We confess that this is often hard for us to do. We like to be in control. We like to think that our abilities and experience enable us to do good work. But then we realize that everything that we have ever accomplished is because you have planned it. We are so grateful that you have a plan for us; and it is far better than any plan we would have.

Please forgive us and remind us every day to bring everything to you.

Amen

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*Written by Chris McPike*

## WATCH



### The Lamb

*By The Bible Project*



### In Christ Alone

*By Shane & Shane*



# DAY SEVEN:

## GOOD FRIDAY

Our journey this week began and will end with a resurrection, but the story of eternal life with God begins and ends (or maybe begins again) with a tree. But oh, how different these trees will look. One tree promised eternal life merely by eating from it. The other promises eternal life, but only through death.

“The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the human he had formed. The Lord God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...And the Lord God commanded the human, ‘you are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on that day you will certainly die’ (Gen 2:8-9, 16-17). But the man and woman decided what was good for themselves and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And they were cast out of the garden to keep them from eating from the tree of life and living forever (Gen 3:22).

And ever since, the story of God’s people has been winding its way back through the wilderness to encounter another tree that would bring them eternal life, but never in the way they’d have expected. Like when Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden, the Israelites were exiled from their homeland in judgment for their disobedience to God. During this time, the prophet Jeremiah spoke about the promised Messiah that would deliver them, and he likens him to a tree. “Look, the days are coming”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“When I will raise up a Righteous Branch for David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. This is the name he will be called: The Lord is our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:5).

In her book *The Crucifixion*, Fleming Rutledge says, “The Messiah came, not to a purified and enlightened world spiritually prepared for his arrival, but rather to a humanity no nearer to its original goodness than on the day Cain murdered his brother Abel. Indeed, the barbarity of crucifixion reveals precisely that diagnosis. From beginning to end, the Holy Scriptures testify that the predicament of fallen humanity is so serious, so grave, so irremediable from within, that nothing short of divine intervention can rectify

it.” (pg. 127). The fact that the Messiah would be called “The Lord is our Righteousness” means it’s *God’s* work that will rectify us all to himself. And this Righteous Branch of David will hang, naked and exposed, upon a cursed tree to do so.

## Jesus Encounters the Tree

Each account of Jesus’ final moments might be a little bit different, but each is invaluablely precious. After they ate, they went to the garden as usual to pray. This was where Judas led the soldiers who had come to arrest him. Each account of Jesus’ final moments can be read here:

### **Matthew 26:31-61, Mark 14:27-15:47, Luke 22:39-23:56, John 18:1-19:42**

By the time Jesus arrived in the world, the Romans had not only created a government, language, and road system that connected (and controlled) many nations together, they had all but perfected the art of torturous execution. And it was this shame-filled execution that awaited Jesus after his final meal with his followers.

What can be surprising sometimes about the Biblical authors is that where they could leave out sections that might taint themselves in an unfavorable light, they instead highlight these moments. In writing their accounts, they could have decided to leave out the part where their teacher and leader was arrested, tried, found guilty, and executed. They could have glossed over it after he’d been resurrected, favoring the glory of Jesus’ being resurrected and leaving out the extreme sorrow and fear that Jesus’ suffering and death would have caused him and them. “In none of the canonical Gospels is the scandal of the Cross removed in favor of the divine glory. In each, the path to glory passes through real suffering” (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, pg. 55)

That night, as Jesus faced certain death, his disciples deserted him. Because at some point that night, they knew he’d be crucified. And this wasn’t just a religious ceremony like their rituals of sacrifices that served to cleanse them from their sin. This was an extraordinarily shameful death used by Romans and reserved almost exclusively for the lowest of society. This was not the death of the Son of God.

“Crucifixion was specifically designed to be the ultimate insult to personal dignity, the last word in humiliating and dehumanizing



treatment. Degradation was the whole point. As Joel Green describes it, 'Executed publicly, situated at a major crossroads or on a well-trafficked artery, devoid of clothing, left to be eaten by birds and beasts, victims of crucifixion were subject to optimal, unmitigated, vicious ridicule.' And so, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, the meaning of the cross lies not only in physical suffering, but especially in rejection and shame." (Rutledge, pg. 78)

When the accounts of Jesus' death are read with that in mind, it's evident that physical torture was not the only goal of those killing him that day. He was spit on, stripped, and mockingly clothed in kingly garments. Passersby jeered at him, sickeningly joining in the theatrics of the event. Even the sign hung above him on his cross read "The King of the Jews" which was meant to mock him, when in fact it testified to the truth. The Jews themselves had had their King mutilated and murdered by the Romans who oppressed them.

"After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now finished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, he said, 'I'm thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it up to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then bowing his head, he gave up his spirit." John 19:28-30. And thus, Jesus died, spiritually alone and emotionally desolate, for the sins of *all* people.

From this death on a cursed and shameful tree, comes the promise of eternal life to all. What Adam and Eve couldn't partake in in the garden, we now have access to through Jesus' death. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13).

Who could have imagined? That Roman tree meant for utter humiliation, degradation, and murder is the very place we would turn to find life everlasting.

"It is finished."

# PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

## Our Father,

You alone are the only true God. You alone are the one worthy of awe.

We can never thank you enough for your love for us. And for your boundless forgiveness, your mercy on us, and your grace toward us—not giving us what we deserve but instead showering us with love and second chances on to infinity!

Jesus, as our High Priest who suffered as the Son of Man on earth, you know exactly how difficult it is to live, to keep ourselves pure, to be in the world but not of the world, to focus every thought on you and your goodness.

You understand every temptation, every large or small sinful act against a fellow human created by you and for you. Yet you remember our frailty and weakness; and are still willing and mighty to save us from our sinful selves. We want to confess our specific sins to you Lord and revel in the forgiveness and the cleansing by your blood, shed for us.

We also know, from the words of our dear Christ Jesus, that it comes down to not loving you as we should, and not loving those around us as you instruct. So, most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned, in thought, word and deed—by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We confess that we have no help and no hope, except in you alone. Oh Lord, how we long to be free of our sins and to live in ways that bring you glory, that draw our loved ones as well as the stranger, to you for salvation.

We praise you God for sending your Son Jesus to completely remove the penalty of sin from us forever. We praise you God for sending your Holy Spirit to give us power over sin every day of our lives. We praise you God that one day we will be utterly free of the presence of sin, and dwell with you in a real place of true perfection, so beyond our comprehension, for eternity.

Glory to you Father, and to the Son Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit—Three in One, as it was before the beginning of time, is now, and will be forever! World without end!

Amen.

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*Written by Barb Dorn*

## WATCH



### **The Tree**

*By The Bible Project*



### **The Sower's Song**

*By Andrew Peterson*



# DAY EIGHT:

## SATURDAY

So they laid their hopes away  
They buried all their dreams about the kingdom He proclaimed  
And they sealed them in the grave  
As a holy silence fell on all Jerusalem...

Six days shall you labor  
The seventh is the Lord's  
In six He made the earth and all the heavens  
But He rested on the seventh  
God rested  
He worked 'til it was finished  
And the seventh day, He blessed it  
He said that it was good  
And the seventh day, He blessed it  
God rested

—Andrew Peterson

**Read Genesis 1:31-2:3**

**Exodus 20:8-11**

**Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

The Sabbath held the dual purpose of reminding the Israelites that God rested on the 7th day from his work of creation and, also that although they had once been slaves in Egypt, now they were free. Slaves labored endlessly with no rest. But their God had just delivered them from slavery, and they no longer needed to toil and labor 7 days a week. He was not the same as the Egyptian gods they had been subject to for generations. Just as he rested on the 7th day from his work of creation, they were to rest in remembrance of God's deliverance, care, and protection of them.

This day of rest quite literally set this nation apart from any surrounding nation at the time. "Sabbath observation has no known parallel in any of the cultures of the ancient Near East and is distinctive in that it is independent of any of the patterns or rhythms of nature. A similar term was used in Babylonian texts as a full moon day when the king officiated at rites of reconciliation with

deity, but it was not a work-free day and has little in common with the Israelite sabbath.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary, OT).

## Read Luke 23:50-56

Jesus died on the day of preparation—the day before the Sabbath. The women who had been following him had stayed, and along with a rich man named Joseph, they laid his body in a tomb. And there he remained on their day of rest.

We don’t know much about this day from scripture. We can imagine what a silent and frightful day that particular Sabbath must have been for those who had followed Jesus as their teacher, their rabbi, and their Savior. He’d been not only killed, but crucified. A death that proclaimed to onlookers that this person was not even fit to be considered human. And in his final hours, his disciples deserted him (Mark 14:50).

“The disciples could not have seen his humiliating and inglorious death as obedience to God, a vindication of his mission, or a heroic martyrdom. On the contrary, precisely because it was a crucifixion, they could have seen it only as the utter discrediting of his claims before man and God. He had been judged a threat to the state by the secular authorities, but far worse in the disciples’ eyes, he had been condemned by the religious authorities, the guardians of faith and morals, as a blasphemer deserving a godless death. It would be difficult to exaggerate the horror of such an unedifying and irreligious outcome to a ministry in the name of God.” (Rutledge, pg. 89-90)

It might be appropriate to sit in silence and sadness today, to try to imagine what Jesus’ followers would have felt like on that Sabbath day. That prescribed day of rest. They would have had no work to busy themselves with, to distract their grieving minds and aching hearts. But maybe they had an inkling of anticipation that maybe something would happen the next day, since the chief priests remembered that while he was alive, Jesus had said “After three days I will rise again,” so they secured the tomb, saying that it was to keep the disciples from stealing his body and claiming he’d risen again.

Whatever they thought and felt that day is a mystery to us. We know that Jesus’ defeat of death was finished on the cross, and he rested on the seventh day. It seems fitting that just as God had rested from his work at the beginning of the world, Jesus would “rest” from his work of re-creation. His death defeated Death, and

in him, we have new life. His death also delivers us from slavery to sin (Romans 6:22-23). We do not need to toil and labor to earn God's favor. We rest in Jesus' finished work on the cross.

Hebrews 4:8-10 says "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for God's people. For the person who has entered his rest has rested from his own works, just as God did from his." The author here is referring to "an eternal rest which will be enjoyed by all who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. It is a 'Sabbath' keeping that will never end" (Believer's Bible Commentary).

The disciples may not have known what was coming the next day as they rested on that Sabbath day. But now we rest from any spiritual striving we might be tempted to because Jesus *is* our Sabbath. We rest in his finished work on the Cross.

## WATCH



### **The Sabbath**

*By The Bible Project*



### **God Rested**

*By Andrew Peterson*



# PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

**Feel free to write** your own prayer of confession about our tendency to strive for God's love instead of resting in Jesus' finished work on the cross.

# DAY NINE:

## RESURRECTION SUNDAY

**Read John 20-21 (Luke 24, Matthew 28, Mark 16)**

The women (including Mary Magdalene) who had stayed at Jesus' crucifixion in other gospel accounts are credited with coming to the tomb early Sunday morning. John names only Mary Magdalene. She reported the news that the tomb was empty to Peter and John, and both entered the tomb where they found only the linen cloths Jesus had been buried in. They left, confused "for they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead" (John 20:9).

But Mary remained. And when *she* looked into the tomb, she saw angels where Jesus' body had been laying. And then she was met by Jesus himself in a garden (John 20:15) that was supposed to be a resting place for the dead. Recognizing the way he said her name, she realized with utter astonishment that he was alive. The seed that had fallen and died, was not only alive but would produce a plentiful harvest (John 12:23-24). She'd been afraid they'd moved his body and they wouldn't be able to prepare it properly for his burial. But what she encountered was the risen Christ himself. He tasked her with announcing this good news to the rest of his followers. The harvest was about to grow.

The night that Jesus was born, angels appeared to the lowly shepherds, and they became the unlikely first bearers of this amazing news. Now upon Jesus' resurrection, a woman, who would not have necessarily been highly esteemed in their society, was given the honor of being the first to herald the even greater news that Jesus was alive *again!*

In the great undoing of the death that sin had brought into this world, Jesus brought life. "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

The Cross is the climax, and the Resurrection is the victorious resolution for all that has been held captive under evil's rule and reign on earth from that fateful day in the first Garden.



“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31).

Jesus asked Martha if she believed that he was the Christ. She said yes.

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**Now the question remains: do you believe?**

**WATCH**

**His Heart Beats**

*By Andrew Peterson*



# DAY TEN:

## WHAT NOW?

### Jesus Encounters Us

Admittedly, we are very far removed from truly understanding the cultural significance and scandal of the cross upon which Jesus died. However, this Monday morning, the joyous fact remains that Jesus is still just as alive today as he was yesterday. We have every right to celebrate and proclaim his victory over the grave today as we did yesterday. As Christians, we don't primarily believe in a set of historical events. We also believe that the resurrected Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to inhabit his followers, to empower them to become ambassadors of this new covenant that has been sealed in his blood.

"Christian faith has never – either at the start or now – been based on historical reconstructions of Jesus, even though Christian faith has always involved some historical claims concerning Jesus. Rather, Christian faith (then and now) is based on religious claims concerning the present power of Jesus...Christian faith is not directed toward a human construction about the past; that would be a form of idolatry. Authentic Christian faith is a response to the living God, whom Christians declare is powerfully at work among them through the resurrected Jesus" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*).

What does that mean for us now? How does this change our lives? What does it mean to follow this crucified and risen Savior? If we've encountered Jesus and his scandalous offer of grace, it means we submit ourselves to God's upside-down Kingdom. Nearly everything he does is opposite what the world would expect or desire (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). The Jews wanted a military king to defeat their political enemies. They got a humble, poor, low-class man who died a death meant to torture and humiliate him in the worst way possible. But it was this King who defeated not their political enemies, but the True Enemy and his hold on the world. It was this King who preached good news to the poor, who healed the sick, who elevated those on the margins of society to seats of honor at his table.

So, we now live in God's upside-down kingdom. We rest in Jesus' scandalous and finished work for us on the cross, which allows

us to love our enemies and pray for any who might persecute us (Matthew 5:44). We seek the good of our neighbor. We alleviate the burden of the poor and oppressed (James 1:27). We clothe and feed the cold and hungry (James 2:15-16). We do the good works that God has prepared for us to do because we are free from striving to please him (Ephesians 2:10). We live our lives in wisdom and understanding, with wisdom from God. This wisdom is “first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace” (James 3:17-18). We do these things not to be seen and rewarded on earth, but because we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, and we love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40).

So now in all we do, “we remember, we proclaim, Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.” —*Andrew Peterson*

## WATCH

### **Is He Worthy?**

*By Andrew Peterson*



