



**MARCH TO THE CROSS SERMON SERIES:**

February 24	John 11:55-12:11	Jesus Anointed @ Bethany
March 3	Matthew 21:1-11, 14:16/Luke 19:28-44	Triumphal Entry
March 10	Mark 11:12-26	The Temple and the Tree
March 17	John 12:23-24/Matthew 21:28-22:14, 23:1-38	The Escalation
March 24	John 13:1-17	The Last Supper
March 31	John 17:1-26/Matthew 26:36-46	The Prayers of Jesus
April 7	Matthew 26:57-68/Luke 22:66-23:25	The Trial
April 14	Matthew 26:31-27:56/Luke 23:26-43	The Crucifixion
April 21	Luke 24:1-12/John 20:1-18/Matt 28:11-15	The Resurrection – What Shall We Tell The World?



## The March to the Cross- Week 1

## The Anointing

February 24th

**Key Scriptures: John 11:55-12:11 (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9)**

Have you ever been in a room full of people when one person, speaking over the volume of the rest, makes a statement that confuses most people, but a few who hear it, maybe even only a couple, seem to have an inside track to what is meant? And, they get it! It's like a hearing a family joke, when you aren't a member of the family and they all laugh while you are left wondering why. Some statements seem lost on the crowds, while just a few understand them.

It would seem, such was the case with Mary in this story. Jesus had predicted His death to his disciples' multiple times during the close of his ministry; a group of disciples that has been estimated to number between 75 and 120. (Mark 9:30-32; Matthew 16:21; Mark 10:32-34) Certainly, Mary was present to hear at least one of these predictions. In His conversation with her regarding Lazarus' death, Jesus had taught Mary not to fear the consequences of physical death. And, she was an eye witness to Jesus' power over it, as she was present to witness Lazarus' resurrection. (John 11:21-27)

And so, our story takes place in a crowded room full of disciples who could have and should have known exactly what Mary knew; that Jesus was about to suffer and die. He was in His final days of life on earth. She knew it. She got it. She had figured it out. So, she does what everyone should have understood, yet no one did. She began preparing His body for burial.

Mary demonstrated some particularly wonderful and powerful comprehension of who Jesus was; what He had come to do; and the personal pressure He was under during His final hours. Her response testified to her understanding. She understood that she loved Him and her breaking heart needed a way to express that love for Him. She understood that His spirit was going to pass through hours of agony as the final hours of the drama of His life played out, and maybe one who truly understood Him could encourage Him by her demonstration of love for Him.

She was found first at the feet of Jesus, a place reserved for the students, the apprentices of a Rabbi, demonstrating her devotion to Him as her Master and Teacher.

She anointed His head, knowing He was a King!

She anointed His feet, showing Him her humility before Him. (an act He would soon repeat with His disciples in the upper room. Do you think Mary may have been present there, too?)

She sacrificed what would have been her most precious and costly possession to honor Him.

She let down her hair before Him, something a woman of that era would have done only for the love of her life.



**Discussion Questions:**

1. When Abraham took Isaac to the top of Mt. Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice, Hebrews 11:17-19 indicates that Abraham figured that if God had asked him to kill Isaac, God would raise him back to life to fulfill the promise He had made to him.
2. How much do you think Mary's experience with the raising of Lazarus, her brother, was reflected in what she did for Jesus when she anointed Him for His burial? Do you think her faith was similar to, comparable to that of Abraham?
3. If tradition says that those that congregated at the feet of a Rabbi were considered apprentices, what does her place at His feet tell you about His regard for her?
4. When, in your own life, would it seem appropriate to demonstrate your love for Jesus in some extravagant, expensive way, like Mary did? Is it ever?
5. As this sermon series marches toward the cross by exposing the events leading up to Jesus' death, are there other times you expect to see Mary close to Jesus? Identify a few. Is there scriptural evidence for your thoughts?

**Take Away:**

This week's passage showed us a stark contrast between 2 people. Go back and read John 12:3-6. Judas and Mary are on opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to where they have their eyes fixed and what is most valuable.

Mary saw Jesus as more valuable than perfume, reputation and anything else, and she didn't just say so with her mouth, she showed it in her actions. Judas on the other hand had his eyes fixed on the personal gain of that perfume. His eyes were fixed on a profit he hoped to gain not on the Savior who sat before him. Who can you relate to most? Spend some time searching scripture this week of word and verses that remind you of who Jesus is and why He is worthy of it all.



## The March to the Cross- Week 2

## Triumphal Entry

March 3<sup>rd</sup>

Have you ever been street-side for a parade? Or maybe in a fieldhouse when the lights go out and the announcer jumps on the loudspeaker to excite the crowd as he announces the starting line-ups? Or maybe in an arena as your favorite band opens their show with your favorite song? What did you do? How did you respond?

I've got to imagine it was pretty similar to what happened when Jesus came in to Jerusalem riding on that donkey. More than likely He came from Bethany, the town of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. This was the place just a few days earlier where He had LITERALLY raised the dead. His dear friend, Lazarus, had been in a tomb long enough that the King James Version said "He stinketh," and the entire town had either heard about, or personally witnessed, him walking back out smelling like roses. NEWSFLASH...That doesn't happen very often! So these people were more than a little excited about the possibility Jesus was the long awaited Messiah because He was doing things messiahs are supposed to do. He had healed the sick, given sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and all sorts of other "messiah-y" things. It's little wonder He drew such a crowd.

But not everyone was excited to see Him. The Pharisees were less than happy about it and most of their reasons just came down to jealousy and a struggle for power. Because of this, they felt like they had more than enough reason to try and put a stop to things. However, when a crowd is cheering, the worst thing you can do is attack the object of those cheers. So, they were sitting back, waiting to see how things would unfold.

And then there were the Apostles. They had been with Him. They had heard the first words of a formerly dead man as well. But they had also heard Jesus say things about laying down His own life...but then again, He also said He had come to be their King...so, the crowd was EXCITED...the Pharisees were excited (but for other reasons)...and the disciples, well, I'm not sure they knew what to think.

### Scriptures:

Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, John 12:12-19

### Discussion Questions:

- After reading the above passages of Scripture, imagine the following groups in the crowd during the Triumphal Entry and discuss their responses (use Scripture to illustrate):
  - The Apostles
  - The "Great Crowd"
  - The Pharisees
- Which of the above groups are you best able to connect with? Why?



### **Discussion Questions (continued)**

- What do the words of the crowd in Matthew 21:9 and John 12:12-13 seem to indicate they believed about Jesus?
- What is the significance of coming in to Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9-10)?
- What does it indicate about Jesus to know He wept over the city of Jerusalem on the day of His greatest earthly glorification (Luke 19:41-44)?
- What do the words of Jesus in Luke 19:39-40 tell us about...well...US?

### **Take Away:**

Jesus is Lord. We should tailor our expectations to who Jesus is, not try to tailor who Jesus is to fit our expectations. Jesus is Lord, and He sees the end from the beginning and desires that you have “life and life to the fullest.” If we try to make him fit our expectations, what is acceptable to us, we run the risk of being just like the “Great Crowd,” or the Pharisees and end up rejecting Him, which ultimately leads to self-destruction. We must not be like the people in Jerusalem, who hailed Jesus as their king, just so long as He fit their image of what a king should be. Let us rather acknowledge him truly as our King, our Lord, our Savior and trust that He is who He says He is.



## The March to the Cross- Week 3

## Temple & the Tree

March 10<sup>th</sup>

### Scripture: Mark 11:12-26

The story of Jesus cursing the fig tree is one with about as many interpretations as there have been theologians over the centuries. Of the many teachings and/or miracles of Jesus that must be understood in the context of its occurrence, surely this one ranks at the top of the list. This story has raised questions like: Is Jesus so very hungry that his disappointment gets the better of Him? Is this an occasion when Jesus' anger becomes unreasonable? Is Jesus not concerned with the fate of the planet and the need for the conservation of trees?

In addition to these, other perplexing questions have been raised about the details of the story: did the tree wither immediately, or overnight? Wasn't it the wrong season for a fig tree to be producing figs anyway?... so, why did Jesus curse it? Why does Jesus launch into a sermon on faith, prayer and forgiveness as an explanation for why He cursed the tree when the disciples ask Him about it?

All these questions and more have been raised about this story!

Our concern in this series of sermons regards Jesus march to the cross. It is by placing this miracle/parable in that context that its relevance is brought to light. The day before Jesus curses the fig tree, He makes His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowds are cheering! Palm branches are waving! Coats are being laid down in Jesus' path. And the phrases that are being chanted are: Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest! (Mark 11:9-10) When Jesus is reprimanded by the Pharisees and ordered to make his disciples stop shouting these things, Jesus only adds to the fervor of the throng by stating that if his disciples were made to stop, the stones would cry out in their place.

Regarding the tree, the temple, and the tree: 3 Points of significance:

1. In scripture and culture, the fig tree regularly represented the nation of Israel. In Jesus mind, the nation of Israel is a fig tree with many leaves and no fruit. They look alive but are spiritually dead. John the Baptist refers to the ax at the root of the tree when he is predicting what Jesus will do in His ministry. (See Matthew 3:9-10). Jesus has already taught His followers, "by their fruits you will know them". (See Matthew 7:15-20). In cursing the tree, Jesus is demonstrating what is happening to the nature of the kingdom in His death and resurrection. He is changing everything! The old ways are ending. The old expectations are dying. Jesus' new Kingdom is coming into the world and it will be recognized by new fruits: prayer, faith, and forgiveness. Jesus had used metaphors parallel to this regularly during His ministry. (See Matthew 7:17-18; Matthew 12:33; John 15:1-6). Even Old Testament prophets used the analogy: Ezekiel 19:10-14.



2. Jesus amplifies this message with His appearance in the Temple, where He flips over the tables of the money changers; forces out the animal sellers; and will not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the court of the Temple. He curses those in the court by declaring that they have turned the Temple into a den of thieves when it was designed to be a house of prayer. (See Solomon's prayer of dedication 1 Kings 8:22-53) In a second way, Jesus is declaring that He is bringing into the world a new way to approach God. (See 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19) The old way is passing out of existence.
3. The next day, when Jesus and His disciples pass by the fig tree the second time, they note that it is withering from the roots. Jesus then launches into a short discourse about the foundational principles of His new Kingdom: faith, prayer and forgiveness. (note: these are the same three principles he taught at the end of the occasion of Mary's anointing Him) He is teaching them that as one kingdom dies, another is taking its place, with new principles, with no borders or palaces; a kingdom of faith, prayer, and forgiveness!

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- Discuss the significance of John the Baptist's declaration: "the axe is already at the root of the tree" juxtaposed with the disciple's recognition that the "fig tree has withered from its roots". Is there any reason to draw meaning from the difference between the lack of fruit on a branch, and the root of the tree when coming to grips with the curse on each?
- Discuss the parallels between the curse on the fig tree and the activities in the Temple as it regards Jesus' heart toward what has been established in contrast to what He is establishing. (Hint: the outward appearance of life, healthy leaves, are no longer going to be the indicators of real life in Jesus' kingdom.)
- Why does Jesus seem to be preaching the same sermon He preached after Mary anointed Him at Bethany here, on His way to and from Jerusalem? What are the three points? Why the same three points?
- Is there any significance to be drawn from the fact that the Jewish leaders neither stop Jesus from cleansing the Temple, nor try to arrest Him at the time? What do you think of people who fear people more than they fear God?

#### **Take Away:**

Three words that come up again in Jesus' march to the cross are faith, prayer and forgiveness. As Jesus continues to turn the world upside down He points to those three things as important parts or characteristics that will be in the Kingdom He is establishing. This week search the scriptures (use google if need be) for more places where Jesus teaches or models those three words in His ministry. Spend time praying that your life would model those would characteristics to the world around you.



## The March to the Cross- Week 4

## The Escalation

March 17<sup>th</sup>

Read through these scriptures together to set the stage for the rest of your discussion:

**Scriptures:** Matthew 21:28-22:14, 23:1-38, John 12:23-24

When I was a kid, I was a mouthy little punk...surprise, I know. I had a quick wit and would mouth off to my older brothers on a daily basis. As a result, I wore near continuous bruises on my thighs from deadleg after deadleg after deadleg (most times while pummeling me they'd defend themselves by telling me it "built character!"). In truth, I got what I deserved. It was mostly in good fun, but each time I spouted off I knew exactly what I was getting myself in to.

Today we find ourselves in a similar situation with Jesus, not that He's "getting what He deserves," but in that He is intentionally baiting the Pharisees into retaliation. He knows exactly what He's getting Himself in to and each parable in our study today is a blatant smack in the face to the opposition. If this is a prize fight leading to the final round at the Cross, this is a sequence of jab-jab-uppercut on a spiritual plane the world has never seen. What He started at the Triumphal Entry and continued at the temple only intensifies when He responds to the challenges of the chief priests and elders of the people (Matthew 21:23).

The beauty of this whole sequence, in my mind, is the "why." When I mouthed off to my brothers and got pounded on, everybody knew why. I had it coming! The punishment fit the crime (that's just part of being a mouthy little brother). For Jesus though, the "why" of His situation had nothing to do with deserving punishment. He was giving jab after jab after perfect jab on behalf of us. He had no sin...no reason to suffer. But He knew the inevitable outcome. He knew where He was headed in a few short days. The outcome of this sequence of events was determined right about the time we were created. So, for Him to "mouth off" to the Pharisees was a carefully calculated plan ON OUR BEHALF. As you discuss this week, marvel at the intentionality of Jesus...make sure to regard His carefully chosen words...but more than anything, remember the fights He picked were FOR YOU AND ME!

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What makes these words of Jesus such powerful "jabs" to the religious leaders?
- Talk about a time when someone called you out for clearly being in the wrong. How did you feel? How did you react? Can you understand the response of the Pharisees?
- In the Parable of the Two Sons, what does Jesus mean when He says "John came to you to show you the way of righteousness" (hint...go to Matthew 3 and Luke 3)?
- What does Jesus being the initiator of these conflicts tell you about His character?



**Take Away:**

Clearly there is some self-examination to be done to make sure we are not taking on a role of a Pharisee or religious leader. But there is also great hope and a great reminder found here. Jesus values everyone at any place in their journey to Him. This week seek out someone who may feel alone or lost on their journey and be an encouragement to them. Remind them of the love that Jesus has for them and the value He sees in them as evident in His final week of fighting for us. Don't forget that truth yourself. Refresh your memory by reading through some of these scriptures. Psalms. 139:13-16, Ephesians 2:4-9, Matthew 6:25-34, Titus 3:4-7.



## The March to the Cross- Week 5

## The Last Supper

March 24<sup>th</sup>

I've had some great meals in my day. I remember a steak from one of the cows on our farm cooked over a campfire during spring break with some buddies way back in the woods that was so good we named the cow that had to die for it (Lucille...yes, I know that's a girl's name and most beef comes from steers, but it is what it is)! I remember fresh fish on the beach on the south coast of Haiti, a New York Strip from Ruth's Chris, and even street tacos made by dear friends in my own driveway! Those are good memories of incredible food, but the thing that makes a meal memorable isn't always how amazing it tastes.

Sometimes a meal is memorable because of the company you keep. I once ate chopped beef from a dead cow the next room over in an open air restaurant in Moshi, Tanzania. Definitely not on my top 10 list for flavor (since the cook literally hacked off pieces with a machete after we ordered it and then threw it in a pot on the floor over a propane burner), but what made that meal so great were the companions with whom I'd just trekked up and down the tallest mountain in Africa all sitting around me, sore but feeling accomplished. Meals shared with friends you've just made or old ones you haven't seen in a while are incredibly memorable, and it isn't just about the food.

And SOMETIMES the circumstances that make for a memorable meal aren't about the food or the people at all. Sometimes, it's because that one meal changes everything. I'd eaten pulled pork plenty of times over the course of my 22 years, but never at a wedding reception where I was sitting in the groom's seat, celebrating the first day of what's now almost 17 years of marriage. I'll never forget that meal, and it isn't just because of the fantastic food and wonderful company. I'll never forget it because that meal marked the first meal after Melissa and I said "I do." And that changed everything!

Maybe you remember the last or favorite meal you ever ate with a loved one...a grandparent...a parent...a sibling...a good friend. The food wasn't so important at the time, but now every time you eat those ingredients you're right back in the same spot with them. That simple shared experience with them and their subsequent passing changed everything.

Today, we're looking at another meal that changed everything. In fact, Jesus tells His disciples He won't eat another meal like this "*until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God*" (Luke 22:16). Sometimes our familiarity with the name of this meal can make it lose its meaning. This is LITERALLY the last meal Jesus will share with His Apostles before the agony of Cross. In just a few hours they will scatter and no doubt run over the events of this meal in their minds time and time again. Even though it might not seem like it for them at the time, this meal marks the beginning of THE TURNING POINT in all of history.

### Scriptures:

Matthew 26:17-30, Luke 22:7-38, John 13:1-17



### **Warm Up Questions:**

- What are some of the most memorable meals you've ever had? Why did they make such an impact?
- If there was one person you could share one meal with from your past, who would it be and why?

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What, do you think, were the Apostles thinking about before the Last Supper started? Was this just like every other Passover meal they had eaten in their minds? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Jesus "eagerly desired" to eat this Passover meal with them? (Luke 22:14)
- If you had been in that upper room to experience this meal, looking back on it, what details of the event do you think would have been the most memorable?
- What do you think were the "Oh, I get it now" moments for the disciples?
- As you read through the three accounts of the Last Supper discuss the different perspectives that each author chose to focus on. Are there any new things you noticed or learned as you looked at the different accounts? What was a common thread in all the accounts?

### **Take Away:**

The Passover meal traditionally included the singing of some Psalms. Psalms 115-118 were most commonly believed to be sung as a reminder of God delivering the Israelites from Egypt. This week read through those Psalms and be reminded of what God has delivered you from through His Son. Spend some time remembering and thanking God for that deliverance.

**\*\*Just for fun...**if Jesus came to your house to eat a meal, what would be your first choice to prepare for Him? If you've got some killer recipe that is good enough to make for the Son of God, share it with the group...better yet, have some of them over and share a meal together celebrating what God has done for you!



## The March to the Cross- Week 6

## Prayers of Jesus

March 31<sup>st</sup>

Scriptures: John 17:1-26, Matthew 26:36-46

I have often struggled with scholar's and commentator's descriptions of the agony Jesus suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane. The top two typical explanations center on the expectation of enduring the physical torture and death He is facing; and/or the agony of knowing He will be accepting the punishment of and separation from God by sacrificing Himself for all the sins ever committed. I must admit that I have been in both camps at different times on my spiritual journey, and you may find yourself in one or both of them today. You are in agreement with the majority of scholars if you are. However, I have a hard time ending my thinking with either of those two explanations when I look at Jesus' statements prior to His appearance in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Mark 9:30-32; Matthew 16:21; Mark 10:32-34) How could He so clearly know and predict the final events of His life, death, and resurrection, only to have them bring Him so much agony in the garden? (Hebrews 12:1-3) How does the point the Hebrew writer makes in this passage square with these two interpretations of the Garden prayers?

I keep thinking that maybe more is going on in Jesus' heart and mind than we have traditionally accepted. John 17 is my door to thinking this way. (actually, John chapters 14-17) It would be a pretty dramatic shift in mindset for Jesus to pray the prayers of John 17, sing a hymn, cross the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane and begin agonizing over the end of His life. The prayers of John 17 are so selfless. Leading to these prayers Jesus has taught, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends". (John 15:13) Jesus is about to take this action of love to its extreme. This is His mindset as He delivers His final teaching in the upper room before heading to the olive grove to pray.

So, if we agree that Jesus may be demonstrating His humanity in agonizing over what lies just ahead of Him when He prays as He does in the garden, "Father, if You are willing take this cup from me"; then could we be open to the idea that at least some of His agony comes from what He last prayed in the upper room? (John 17) I am hoping so. It fits the character of Jesus that comes from His lips when on the cross He prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". (the most selfless prayer ever prayed).

What then would be causing some of His agony in the garden? 1) His desire that His Father be glorified in His death 2) His desire that His disciples would be protected in the world 3) His desire that believers down through the ages would remain unified...one...with Him and His Father. Are these three selfless prayers enough to cause Him to agonize in the garden? It's at least possible, coming, as they do, from the most selfless person who ever lived! To me, it would seem more in His character to agonize over others than to agonize over Himself. (as I have said, it would put me in the minority to think this way)



### **Discussion Questions:**

- Discuss Jesus' garden request to have "this cup pass from me". Does the cup to which Jesus is referring have a relationship to "the cup of the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you"? How about the cup to which Jesus refers in Matthew 20:20-22? Can you justify this prayer of Jesus with His statement in John 12:27?
- Do you think it's possible that Jesus could look ahead across the centuries to come and see the divisions we've made in His church and be agonizing over them before His death? (John 17:20-26)
- If we are seeing Jesus' humanity in His garden prayer to have "this cup pass from me", discuss other battles Jesus must have had between His mission and His humanity to clarify this struggle in the garden. His temptations in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11)... His longing to gather the Jews under His wings like a hen gathers chicks. (Matthew 23:37) Can you think of others?
- What does it do to your heart to know that your life contributes to the weight of Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane? Whether by contributing to the weight of sin He feels...or by His desire to see you be one with all other believers so that the world would know that God sent Him into the world to redeem us.

### **Take Away:**

This week spend some time reading through John 17 and as you do contemplate the example that Jesus set in His prayer and how that could impact your prayers. There are three basic parts to His prayer. 1. He prays for himself. He prays that God would continue to be glorified through Him and that He would be re-established with the Father. 2. He prays for those that are with Him now. That they would be made holy in truth (His Word). 3. Finally, He prays for those that will follow Him (us). He prays for unity!

Write out a prayer that you can pray based on those three areas. For example... Father, help me to live for your glory in all I say and do as I look forward to the day that I will be made complete with you. Father, be with those who are journeying in faith with you today. Keep them strong and established in Truth. Father, raise up another generation of men and women who chase hard after you and your Truth. Unite them in the same way that you are united with your Son. Fill them with your Spirit so their lives reflect your love. Amen.



## The March to the Cross- Week 7

## The Trial

April 7<sup>th</sup>

**Scriptures:** Matthew 26:57-27:31; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 18

Isaiah 53:7 *“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”*

Because Jesus did not try to defend himself during his long night of oppression, does not mean that He had no defense! If we total up his trials on the night of his betrayal, we find that he was led before Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and back to Pilate after which he was mocked and flogged by Roman soldiers and forced to carry His own cross to the site of His crucifixion. So, he was up all night; after eating the Passover with His disciples; after praying His heart out in the garden (while his disciples slept); after being betrayed by one of His own. Still, His composure, His steadfast commitment to fulfill His purpose on earth never wavers. Paraphrased, the only words He speaks in His own defense are the very words by which He’s condemned: After this, you will see the Son of Man seated at the Right Hand of the One on High, and then coming again on the clouds. At this statement, His accusers scream “Blasphemy” and condemn Him to die. For anyone else who has or ever will live on this earth, blasphemy would have been an accurate charge; claiming to be the Son of God. But for Jesus, it was the single statement of His defense that was true and was the clear dividing line between those who believed in Him, and those who didn’t. So, it was the only statement He made. No matter what else they said, He simply kept quiet and endured it. (just as Isaiah had prophesied He would)

It strikes me that during His trials, Jesus closes the curtain on several parts of the old Jewish order. 1. He is fulfilling prophecy. Had any of His accusers had their wits about them, surely they would have known Isaiah’s prophecies and recognized that Jesus was fulfilling them in their presence. They were rejecting the stone that was becoming the cornerstone of a new Kingdom and should have realized it but didn’t. 2. As He had said in His prayers in John 17, the authority of God, the glory of God had been given to Him, and in the face of Jewish and Roman authority He chose not to exercise power, but forgiveness. He chose a different form of kingship. But, make no mistake, He knew He was a king; He knew He was a new kind of high priest; He knew He was the promised Messiah. His silence was not exercised in weakness but in humility. 3. His accusers were sentencing Him to death within earshot of the sacrifice of 10’s of thousands of Passover lambs; which had been going on all day and would recommence the next morning. Standing before them was THE LAMB who was taking away the sin of the world; who would conquer death; who would tear the veil in two providing free and open access to God for the rest of history. They simply didn’t realize it...but, should have.

During His trials, Jesus sets the example for how Christians can and should endure ridicule, scorn, and false accusation. In the moments we probably most want to defend either Jesus, or ourselves, he shows us that exercising power in the face of persecution gives away the high ground, and gives up the opportunity to extend love, grace, and forgiveness where it is most needed. We would do well to learn the lessons He taught us and of which Peter reminds us, “commit yourself to your faithful Creator and continue to do good.”



**Discussion Questions:**

- Discuss how far the religious leaders who held court on Jesus' destiny were from "entering the kingdom" in light of John 3:1-3.
- Discuss the nature of the people who were finding their way into the kingdom in light of Luke 18:9-14
- Matthew 23:13-39 expresses what Jesus had every right to say to his accusers on the night of his betrayal and trials. In your opinion, why do you think He chose silence instead?
- In light of Jesus response to His accusers, interpret what Peter must have meant when he wrote 1 Peter 3:13-15?

**Take Away:**

Jesus once again shows us a glimpse of the "upside down" Kingdom that He is establishing. A Kingdom that is not about the powerful rather the humble. A Kingdom that is not about self rather about selflessness. Re-read Luke 18:9-14. Be honest, which prayer sounds most like your prayers? Colossians 3:12 says; "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Spend time this week reflecting on what you are clothing yourself with. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit so the world can see more of Him and less of you



## The March to the Cross- Week 8

## The Crucifixion

April 14<sup>th</sup>

**Scriptures:** Matthew 27:33-56; Mark 15:21-32; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:16-37

I would rather speak of the crucifixion as a coronation, rather than the crucifixion. It is here that everything Jesus did on earth came to its climax. John 3:14-15 tells the final story well...then when you add John 3:16-17, it really is complete. The final revelation of God's love. Ultimate act of love. The moment in time that brings everything before it to a close. The ultimate redemption. The ultimate atonement. The onset of renewed access to God.

Jesus passion for His mission is best summarized by His 7 last utterances from the cross:

**Luke 23:34** *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

In the midst of his excruciating suffering, the heart of Jesus was focused on others rather than himself. Here we see the nature of his love—unconditional and divine.

**Luke 23:43** *"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

One of the criminals who was crucified with Christ had recognized who Jesus was and expressed faith in him as Savior. Here we see God's grace poured out through faith, as Jesus assured the dying man of his forgiveness and eternal salvation.

**John 19:26–27** *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."*

Jesus, looking down from the cross, was still filled with the concerns of a son for the earthly needs of his mother. None of his brothers were there to care for her, so he gave this task to the Apostle John. Here we clearly see Christ's humanity.

**Matthew 27:46** (also Mark 15:34) *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

In the darkest hours of his suffering, Jesus cried out the opening words of Psalm 22. And although much has been suggested regarding the meaning of this phrase, it was quite apparent the agony Christ felt as he expressed separation from God. Here we see the Father turning away from the Son as Jesus bore the full weight of our sin.

**John 19:28** *Jesus knew that everything was now finished, and to fulfill the Scriptures he said, "I am thirsty."*

Jesus refused the initial drink of vinegar, gall, and myrrh (Matthew 27:34 and Mark 15:23) offered to alleviate his suffering. But here, several hours later, we see Jesus fulfilling the messianic prophecy found in Psalm 69:21.



**John 19:30 ... he said, "It is finished!"**

Jesus knew he was suffering the crucifixion for a purpose. Earlier he had said in John 10:18 of his life, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (NIV) These three words were packed with meaning, for what was finished here was not only Christ's earthly life, not only his suffering and dying, not only the payment for sin and the redemption of the world—but the very reason and purpose he came to earth was finished. His final act of obedience was complete. The Scriptures had been fulfilled.

**Luke 23:46** *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

Here Jesus closes with the words of Psalm 31:5, speaking to the Father. We see his complete trust in the Father. Jesus entered death in the same way he lived each day of his life, offering up his life as the perfect sacrifice and placing himself in God's hands.

**Discussion Questions:**

- In which phrases do you see Jesus' words speaking directly to you?
- Jesus never sat on a throne. Jesus never lifted a ruler's scepter. Jesus never lived in a palace. Jesus never walked marble halls wearing regal robes. Yet, He is the most adored, worshipped, loved King in all of history. Discuss how His final seven words make Him the greatest King, ever!
- What did the Roman Centurion observe that caused him to confess: "Surely, this was the Son of God"?
- If Mary, from the beginning of Jesus' life til these moments had, "pondered everything in her heart"; what do you suppose she felt for Jesus while He hung on the cross?
- Do you understand the communion emblems even better than before... IE: the broken body and shed blood? And why Jesus wants us to never forget the price He paid for the remission of our sins?
- What does the phrase, "take up your cross daily and follow Me" mean to you in light of this lesson?

**Take Away:**

Spend time going back through past March to the Cross weekly studies. Don't skip past the crucifixion, spend time feeling the weight of the cross and meditating on all that He went through and who He went through it for. Write down some of the key moments on the March to the Cross that captivated you and thank God for them. Remember it is Friday but.... Sunday's a coming!



## **The March to the Cross- Week 9**

## **The Resurrection**

**April 21<sup>st</sup>**

Wanna know one of the most annoying things about heating your home with wood? It's not the mess, although there are wood chips and ashes everywhere. It's not how dry the air gets, although we always have a cast iron pot filled with water on top the stove. For me, the most annoying part of heating with wood is having to get down with your face in the door of the stove and blow like you're trying to inflate a beach ball for 10 minutes every time you start a fire. That's why I was so excited and grateful when a friend of mine gave me a fire poker-fire starter stick combo thing. That's a horrible description, but long story short, it's a 3 ft long pipe with a hook on the end for stirring the fire but the pipe is hollow, so you can blow air on the fire without burning off your eye brows or filling your lungs with smoke. It really is AMAZING...and...since we try to keep a fire going from roughly October to April it makes for one of the best gifts I've ever received. And now, you all know about it, too!

Have you ever received a great gift? Not like roses or candy, but something really practical? What did you do after you got it? Did you hide it and keep it all to yourself? Or did you tell as many people as you could about it because of what a difference it made in your life?!

Or what about something you discovered for yourself you really love? Do you try to keep it a secret so no one else gets access to it? I bought my current mountain bike about 4 years ago and I absolutely love it. In fact, I've told other people about that specific brand and set-up who have in turn gone out and purchased one just like it. And guess what? They love it too! That's just kind of the natural thing we do when we find something we really love. We share it with as many people who will listen. Cause, honestly, if I know something that would improve your life and I refuse to tell you about it, what does that make me? Yeah, I'd say a bit of a jerk, too!

In the passages of Scripture you'll read today, I hope you find a common thread. In case you miss it, I'll go ahead and tell you what it is: Every person who encountered the Risen Lord IMMEDIATELY went and told other people about it. They couldn't help themselves (Acts 4:20)! They were like my friend (Thanks, Tony) who saw my situation, had a solution to drastically improve it, and couldn't keep it to himself. And the news these folks in the following passages had to share was A LOT MORE IMPORTANT than news about a nifty fire tool. The former was just about not getting my eyebrows singed. The latter is about how not to get your whole body and soul singed (Jude 23)!

You know what I've done multiple times since I got my fire-poker-blower-stick (Fire Dragon is the best name I've heard for them)? I've thanked my friend time and time again. He's probably got a dozen text messages from me telling him what an amazing gift that was. You see, that's the nature of someone on the receiving end of a great gift, especially a gift that keeps on giving. You're FOREVER grateful to the friend that introduced you to it. And you know what else, I've never heard anyone who has encountered the Risen Lord that has been angry at the person who made that introduction.



Have you met Him? Do you know the Savior that left His tomb behind? If so, I know you're grateful to the person who made that introduction. And now that you know something/Someone that has changed (okay, "saved") your life, who are you telling?

**Scriptures:**

Matthew 28:11-15, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-18, Acts 4:1-20

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is the best gift you've ever received? What made it so meaningful?
- Have you ever discovered anything on your own that is so life-changing you had to tell others about it? Share it with the group so they can know too!
- Beyond their willingness to tell everyone they met about Him, is there anything else you find in common about the folks who witnessed the post-resurrection Jesus?
- Who was the last person you told about Christ?
- What do you think are the biggest limitations to us telling everyone we know about the life-changing work of Jesus in our lives?

**Take Away:**

Is there someone today God has laid on your heart to tell about what Jesus has done for you? If you are willing, share that name with the group or at least another person so they can be lifting you up in prayer. The Good News isn't meant for us to keep for ourselves- so take the Good News and share it. HE IS RISEN!

