

DIVING DEEPER

HOLY WEEK



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PALM SUNDAY

1st day of the Jewish week and the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

The city is full with a crowd of Jesus' followers and Galilean pilgrims.

Jerusalem was made up of about 40,000 people and would grow by 6 times during the passover for the annual feast. An estimated 240,000 people would have been in the city.

This was an exciting place at this time of year, so the Romans were very watchful because they always wanted remain in control during the festivities taking place.

Jesus entered on a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah's vision of the messianic arrival. He entered Jerusalem in exactly that way.

***Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

- Zch 9:9

This also paints the picture and recalls the idea of Solomon entering into Jerusalem on a donkey as he is anointed as king; Christ, of course, is the King of kings.

(1 Kings 1:37-40)

The message, visually and spiritually, is clear that the Messianic King had indeed arrived. It was met with excitement because so many had heard about the promise of a messiah. They expected a national deliverer to reestablish the Davidic kingdom. Jesus is one that taught with authority that far exceeded the other religious leaders of the day. He was one who healed and even raised the dead. He very much looked the part of the messiah. So they welcomed him and celebrated his arrival and prepared the way for him by laying down palm branches as he entered the city.

He was entering into a very volatile situation in the city. His arrival created a lot of concern for Roman leaders and Jewish bureaucrats. Romans wanted to keep a lid on things so to speak, and the Jewish authorities wanted to keep a good reputation with Rome as well. Neither wanted things to get out of hand. Thus, the tension began to grow...

HOLY MONDAY

Now it's Monday. Jesus and his disciples had spent the night in Bethany.

They make their westward journey back into the city of Jerusalem.

We see Jesus engage in two of his most unusual or startling activities. He comes across a fig tree as they approach Jerusalem and it does not bear fruit even though it is healthy enough to do so. Jesus calls down a curse upon that tree. When he arrives to the temple mount, he overturns the tables and drives out the money changers which scatters many other pilgrims away. He called them a den of thieves.

Why would Jesus curse a tree just because it wouldn't provide him food?

What can we learn about the place of the temple life in Jewish life?

How does all of this fit into the final storyline of Jesus' march toward Calvary?

We must see that the cursing of the fig tree has to relate to the cleansing of the temple. This literary technique is used many times in the Gospel of Mark. (Two events with a seemingly different event sandwiched in-between.)

Looking into the entirety of Scripture is important. A healthy and faithful reading of the Old Testament gives us the understanding that the fig tree is closely associated with Israel. This all comes together when we see that Jesus goes to the temple and cleanses it as an act of judgement against Israel. In cursing the fig tree, he is parabolically judging Israel and essentially he is saying, "Your life does not reflect the fruitfulness that should be visible in a Christian, and as a result, you are cursed." (*See Mark 11:12-25*)

The temple was not just a central place of the Jewish religion. The temple was the actual, literal, place in which the living presence of God's glory resided among His people. With Jesus teaching in such a place, and during a time of pilgrimage, it was as if he was bringing the Jewish people from all over the world back to their home to hear the voice of God in his house. When Jesus spoke elsewhere, it was in a synagogue. The synagogues were originally developed to be a presence of the temple; Especially during the exile when the temple had been destroyed. They were pictures of the temple in all the parts of the world where the Jewish people lived. Rabbis would often travel from synagogue to synagogue to teach. Christ was considered a rabbi and a teacher, but at the same time, the religious leaders opposed him because what he was teaching was in such conflict with what they were teaching. He was accepted by the people, but rejected by the Pharisees and Sadducees. Debates took place because of the vast difference in what was being taught.

HOLY TUESDAY

Why are the Jewish leaders so upset?

What, exactly, are their objections to Jesus' teachings?

Why, precisely, was he viewed as such a threat?

At this point in time, what were their options and what was their strategy?

At every moment during passion week, the leaders were watching Jesus. Not because they were intrigued, but because they were looking for a way to stop him. They still viewed Jesus as this kid from Nazareth, as if he was born on the wrong side of the tracks. His teaching threatened their lifestyle, their pride, their safety in political stature with Rome...etc.

When Jesus did his cleansing of the temple on Monday, he was hailed among his followers. They thought that it was great that he had broken the monopoly at least for one morning or afternoon.

This put the authorities in somewhat of a panic. Now they somehow have to drive a wedge between Jesus and his followers. Not only are they worried about political stature, they are facing some economic pressure if this is the new

standard that is set. So they devise a plan to get Jesus to misspeak himself into trouble. Every one of the debate questions are baited and loaded and unanswerable and self-defeating, however, Jesus answered every one of them correctly.

The Jewish leaders had a measure of freedom, religiously and politically speaking. As long as things remained peaceful, the Romans would allow them some measure of autonomy. At the same time, if they were unable to control the population, the Romans would surely and swiftly step in to regain control.

So then, the Jewish leaders sought to do what they needed to do in secrecy and eliminate their threat in a stealthy manner. That is why they turned to Judas.

HOLY WEDNESDAY

As Jesus continues through the city teaching his disciples and other pilgrims, there is another piece of the story playing out in the shadows. The Sanhedrin religious body are having an intense, internal deliberation as to what they would plan to do to stop Jesus and how to get rid of him.

Who are these religious leaders?

What were their motivations and what were they seeking to accomplish?

Why did they find Jesus Christ to be so threatening to their religion and to their way of life?

The Sanhedrin was made up of overly zealous, heavy-handed, legalistic Jews that essentially had no spirituality about them. They reigned harshly over the Jewish people by adding very difficult guidelines to follow on top of the Levitical Law. This made it impossible to keep up with seeking atonement, providing sacrifice, or living up to their standards.

Jesus preached a better way. Jesus was the way. He *is* the way. He is the redemption from the weightiness of the Law and the chains of sin. You see, the Law was never going to save us. It was faith in God keeping his promise that the coming messiah would save us. Jesus preached a liberating message that the religious elites despised because it called

out their flesh and their hypocrisy. This is why they conspired and why they infiltrated someone close to Christ.

Judas was in charge of handling the money among the disciples. Unfortunately, this became a ruling thing in his heart. The Sanhedrin took advantage of this and offered Judas a pitiful “reward” (compared to the inheritance that would have awaited him in heaven should he have remained faithful). But all in all this event was ordained in heaven before creation that Jesus would be betrayed and handed over to those that would seek to destroy his body and his message.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Jesus and the disciples celebrated the Passover feast on Thursday evening as was custom for the Galilean Jews.

Jesus changes the meaning of the Passover meal.

Jesus breaks the bread and offers the cup.

Jesus dismisses Judas and makes the disciples aware of the upcoming betrayals.

Jesus and the disciples leave the upper room. He and a select few of the disciples make their way to the garden of Gethsemane where he provides one of the most beautiful pictures of prayer, submission, and propitiation (substitution).

All of this was spiritual preparation for what was to come next.

Jesus finishes his time in agonizing prayer and announces that his time had indeed come.

Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss on his cheek to mark him as the one who must be arrested.

Christ is arrested and the disciples scatter, leaving Jesus utterly alone. Betrayal had surely come...

GOOD FRIDAY



In the earliest hours of the morning, Jesus was arrested and taken to the house/dungeon of Caiaphas, the high priest.

In a secret, Sanhedrin trial they conspire further to turn Jesus over to the Roman authorities to be dealt with. Christ is mocked, spit upon, slapped, and shamed.

He is led to the Roman authorities for sentencing and passed back and forth between Pontius Pilate and Herod. He is flogged and beaten. Pilate finds Christ at faultless against any laws and brings Jesus and Barabbas before the crowd as it is accustomed that during this Passover season, the Romans would let a prisoner go free. The crowd, that earlier in the week cried “Hosanna” now called out for the murderer, Barabbas, to be released and, furthermore called for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, despite his innocence of laws both man made and God given.

It has already been such a tragic and despairing trial, but so much more would come.

Jesus suffered physical and emotional toil. He was tired. He was beaten. He was alone and betrayed. Yet, still more suffering was to come.

He was forced to carry his own cross. This picture of death was staring him right in the eyes, but still he persisted.

Jesus carries his cross through the Via Dolorosa. The way of sorrows.

He is mocked, spit upon, and whipped further along this path. He drops the cross and falls. The guards grab a man from the crowd named Simon of Cyrene to continue carrying the cross. Real, human people are near this man that would soon be hung on the cross. They surely could have seen the blood on his clothing. The rips in his skin from the flogging. They could have smelled the sweat on his body and seen the dryness of his mouth as he was exhausted from the torture... Yet still he would suffer more.

They arrive at Golgotha, the place of the skull. The time has come. Jesus is nailed to the cross. Further mocking comes. A sign is placed above him sneering that he is “the king of the Jews.”

A question that may be asked...

Why on earth would God allow this to happen?

Answer 1: Because the Lord is serious about sin. If we think too lightly of sin, we will always think lightly of the cross of Christ. Sin must be dealt with. It cannot be in the presence of God.

Answer 2: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. - John 3:16-18

Look to the cross of Christ. It is the collision of two worlds. This is the picture of God's mercy upon us. It is also the picture of God's judgement of sin. It is the connection point of Spirit and flesh. Sin had to be dealt with because the Lord's righteousness requires it. But in His wrath, he remembers mercy.

Jesus speaks while he is on the cross. He says the word TETELESTAI, which means “it is finished.” The debt of sin has been paid. He breathes his last breath and the earth shakes, the sky goes dark, and the veil in the temple is torn in two from the top to bottom the same way that a grieving father would tear his garment upon the news of the death of his child.

SATURDAY

... Darkness... Confusion..... Questions....
Doubt.....Hopelessness...Fear.....Grief.....

But not the end...

RESURRECTION SUNDAY

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

- Mark 16:1-9

There is hope to be found in the empty grave. Sin and death have been defeated. Those who have a sincere faith in Jesus Christ will only ever suffer a physical death, but continue into everlasting life in the presence of the Lord.

Every question that you've ever had about life, God, and existence will either be answered or made redundant when you are in full communion with the Lord in heaven.

We encourage you to spend time in prayer. Prepare your heart. We encourage you to repent of any sin in your life, both known and unknown, and believe in this gospel story. Believe that Christ Jesus has indeed paid for your sin and is the only mediator between you and the Father.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. - Romans 15:13