

Grace Community Church

EASTER

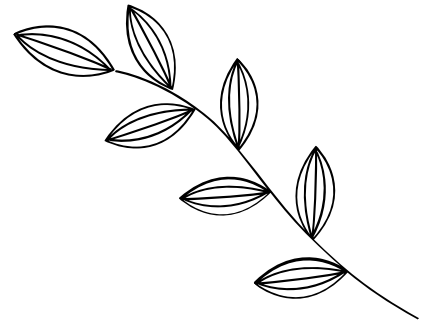
meditations



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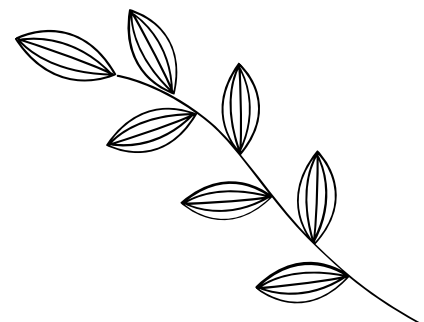
WEEK ONE

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL



We invite you to join us in reflection and prayer as we prepare our hearts during this season of remembering Christ's death and resurrection.

Each day begins with a passage of reflection. After reading and pondering, read the devotional to go along with the passage. Each day ends in prayer. Use the prompt as a guide, but feel free to make the prayer your own. May this devotional bless you this Easter season!



April 3



by Katie Kigar

READING
Luke 9:51

FACING JERUSALEM

Jesus knew what was coming. He had studied the Scriptures in the light of the Spirit and knew what they foretold about the Messiah. His closest friends, the disciples, did not understand, though Jesus had explained what must happen to the Son of Man more than once. But Jesus knew well what would be required of him. And in this lonely knowledge He set out to do what his Father had been preparing him for. The day of his ascension was drawing near, but first the cross. The exalted glory was coming, but first the cross. The joy of triumph and victory was sure, but first the cross.

This wasn't easy for Jesus! He was a man like us in every way with the exception of sin. He was not immune to the dread of what was coming, but he had learned to walk through increasing difficulties with his eyes fixed on his Father and his soul depending on the power of the Holy Spirit. So as he went through towns and villages in Luke's narrative, the end was always clear to him. As he taught and healed and rejoiced and wept, he was always "journeying toward Jerusalem" (Luke 13:22) and "on the way to Jerusalem" (Luke 17:11). The "joy that was set before him" (Hebrews 12:2) compelled him forward, but let us not pass quickly by the endurance and faith this required of our Lord!

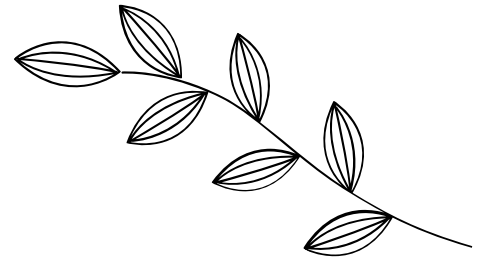
Oh, what a Savior! What an example! For we, too, are called to press on through trial and dread with our eyes fixed on the same Father and our soul empowered by the Spirit within. We, too, are promised future joy that is meant to sustain us in present suffering. We follow in the footsteps of the One who shows us how to do these things and who walks with us in perfect understanding because he knows.

PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, thank you for setting your face toward Jerusalem. Thank you for enduring the cross so that we might live in you. Help us now as we follow your example! Give us eyes of faith that we might not shrink back from the path you have set for us - knowing that we do not walk alone.”



April 4



by Julie Anderson

READING

Luke 19:41-44

JESUS WEPT

This passage has such a beautiful picture of the gospel. Knowing what was to come in the future days Jesus weeps for those who will reject Him and have rejected Him. He weeps for what they will endure because of their rejection of Him, and yet still continues on towards the cross.

Not only does this passage show us the great love He has for those He came to save, it also shows us an example of compassion in the midst of adversity and rejection.

In a culture and world that is growing more hostile towards the things of God we as believers have the opportunity to show Christlikeness in the midst of adversity and rejection.

Do our hearts break for those who have rejected Christ's work on the cross? Does it break for those who sin is out there in the open, and blatantly against the word of God? Do we avoid those we know are against God and his commands, or in our hearts are we angry and disgusted with them?

What do we see Christ do in this passage? He continues on with the mission His father had set before him. He continues on because of his great love for us.

How as believers do we live out this example set before us? John 15:18-20 Jesus tells us that when we are abiding in Him, and not of the world, we will be hated by the world just as He was hated. But we are still called to go out and make disciples of all nations. So our mission continues as well.

How can you live this mission out with the compassion like Christ showed for the people who rejected him? Let your heart be deeply moved with love for the people who are fighting against the message of hope that comes in the work that Christ did on the cross. And when you're struggling with the compassion needed, ask the Lord to move your heart in the way that Christ's heart was moved for the people in Jerusalem, and all of those who came to save.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the great love and compassion you showed me and sending your Son to take the punishment for my sin, thank you for pursuing me when I was an enemy of you.

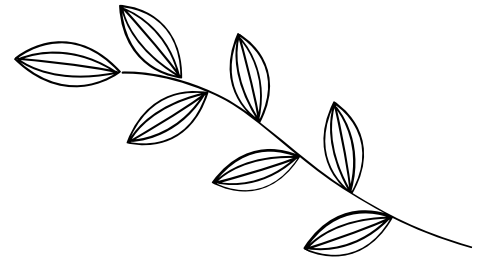
Please give me your heart for the people around me who are burdened with sin and broken just like I was before you rescued me. Let me see these people with your eyes, and give me courage to pursue them in love, so that they may be set free.

Amen



April 5

by Todd Castor



READING
Hebrews 9:12

HIS PRECIOUS BLOOD

The sacrifices of the old covenant were ineffectual. While the Day of Atonement covered the penalty for the Israelites' sins each year, they were still affected by sin each day. Sin cannot stand in the presence of a holy God. Therefore, for the people to approach God, they needed to perform animal sacrifices to be cleansed of any sins they had done. Regular blood sacrifices were done by the people of the old covenant so that they could worship and serve the living God.

If there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, how could Jesus enter the holy of holies without sacrificing an animal? Anyone who entered the holy of holies contrary to the shedding of blood would have found his life taken immediately (Leviticus 10). But Jesus is different. He entered the Most Holy Place through the price of his own blood, because of His own sacrifice, because of His love for us. There is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood and there is no permanent forgiveness of sin without Jesus' blood. By the shedding of His own blood, He secured eternal redemption. He did once and for all what animal blood could not do.

We sing and talk about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross! We converse about how His blood has washed us clean. That His shed blood covered our sin. That our sin is as far as the east is from the west. Without what Jesus did we would be lost, forever separated from God. We speak of these truths and praise God for his blood. But does it change us? Not did it change us, but does it change us? Is your day different? How you talk, how you treat those around you, how you perform at you job? Does the truth that Jesus sacrificed everything when He shed His blood and died, change everything about you?

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "if anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself". Have you denied self or is your happiness, your satisfaction still #1? He went on to say, "whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Jesus is not talking about physical death here, but again the turning from self to God and others. The greatest commandment is, "to love the Lord your God with all thy heart, soul and mind" but let's not forget the second part, "to love your neighbor as yourself".

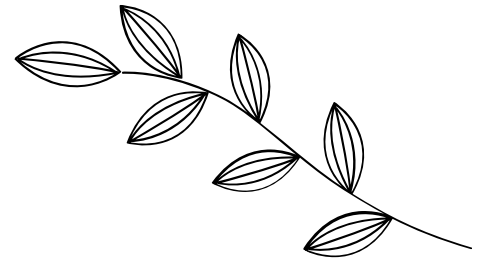
PRAYER

Father, I humbly come before you. Thank you for your son's sacrifice for me. He gave His life so that I might have life. He shed His blood so that I might have joy in Him. By your grace through your Spirit may I deny self and give my life for you!



April 6

by Kyle Hall



READING
Galatians 3:13

A CURSE FOR US

According to Lifeway Research, 67% of Americans say they are sinners while only 5% say they're fine with being sinners. Most Americans can admit they have sinned and they are not too happy about it.

So what is sin? Sin is rebellion against the Creator of all and Almighty God. The Bible raises that stat to 100%, saying, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) and continues later in Romans, saying, "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23a). The Bible states that even one sin is sufficient to bring a curse of wrath and death upon us. Therefore, all of us (Yes, that means you, me, your siblings, neighbors, co-workers, and that weird guy you saw walking the other day) have sinned against God and all remain under the curse of the wrath of our holy and just God.

This is bad news. We are all born with a curse and a sentence to death apart from God.

This passage above is one of the keys to breaking a common misunderstanding many have with God, maybe you've thought this too: God is really harsh to allow a curse upon all these people. The key to understanding God's love amidst his just wrath is this phrase: "He became a curse for us."

This is incredible news. God did not leave us hopeless with the curse of sin upon us, rather He sent His Son to become a curse and in result, pay the price for the sin of all who would repent and believe in His death and resurrection!

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23b) We celebrate Good Friday because it remembers the goodness of God in sending His Son to take on the curse on our behalf so that we can have eternal life with Him. Jesus became cursed with the wrath of God and death so that you wouldn't have to endure that punishment. How does this change the way you view Jesus?

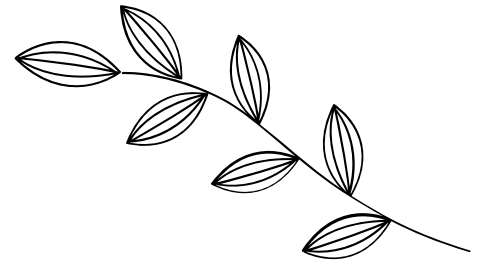
PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for how you became a curse for me, that I might be able to have abundant and eternal life with you. Thank you for your humility as you stepped down from heaven to ransom and redeem us. Thank you that one day we will be with you forever in eternity.



April 7

by Destinee Veenstra



READING

1 Corinthians 1:23-24

POWER AND WISDOM DISPLAYED

The agony of Calvary was not the picture the people of God imagined when they thought of their future Messiah. Instead, they longed for a Messiah, with a sword in hand, to conquer their current enemies. Little did they know that their Messiah would live a humble life and die a shameful, gruesome death. Christ's crucifixion was scandalous to the Jewish people, a “stumbling block,” as Paul says in verse 23. How could their King die a death like that?

On the other hand, the Greeks of that time viewed the crucifixion of Christ as foolish. The whispers of their worldly wisdom questioned why an all-powerful God would humiliate himself to die such a death.

Do these viewpoints sound familiar? Our world sees the cross as an instrument of shame and foolishness. So as Christians, how should we view the cross?

Paul tells us in verse 24. The cross exhibits the power and wisdom of God. The power of God revealed upon the cross was His power to defeat sin - every sin, past and present, covered in the cleansing blood of Christ. The wisdom of God revealed upon the cross was His sovereignty in how Christ died. Gruesome. Tragic. Necessary.

When we look to the cross, we should see God's power and wisdom displayed. This display of power should humbly draw us to our knees. The wisdom of God should encourage our hearts to trust in His sovereignty.

Remember the true picture of Christ's crucifixion in your moments of shame, pride, and weakness. Let God's power remind you of what Christ accomplished upon the bloody hill of Calvary - sin wiped clean! Let His power give you hope in what He accomplished three days later - death defeated!

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for the unexpected gift of your Son.

Thank you for revealing your power on the cross in defeating every sin and evil in my life. Thank you for Your unfathomable wisdom. You destined the crucifixion of Christ for my sins in

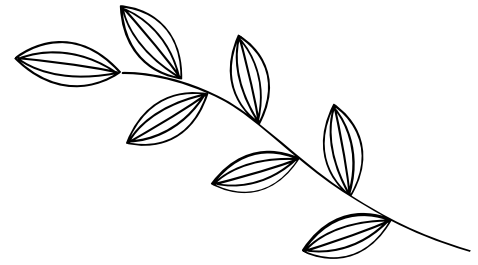
Your wisdom and sovereignty. Lord, bring me to my knees in humility and thankfulness for who You are. Strengthen my heart to share the power and wisdom of the cross with those around me. In Your precious name, Amen.



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**WEEK
TWO**

April 10



by Tim Vande Guchte

READING
Mark 16:6

HE IS RISEN

Do you remember where you were when Christ healed you? When he stepped into your world and set you free? Not all of us remember the exact day when Jesus began to transform our lives, but there's one woman in history who will never forget the day when He set her free. Her name is Mary Magdalene. She was in horrific distress and domination. She was completely overtaken by the seven evil spirits that kept her locked up in the chains of despair and destruction. Her world was falling apart. Until that day when Jesus stepped in and changed her forever. He cast the demons out of her heart, set her mind free, and set her feet on a path to follow him all the days of her life. After that, all she wanted to do was to know him, love him, and follow him everywhere he went.

She was one of the Mary's who stood near the foot of the Cross watching Jesus, her friend and Savior willingly lay his life down on the cross. She followed close by as Joseph of Arimathea gained permission to take down Jesus' body and place it in a proper tomb. And then she waited, wondering about the promising words that Jesus said as she walked with him and the company of disciples in Galilee. "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." (Mt. 17:22-23)

14 But, like any of us who has lost a loved one, her heart was likely shattered with grief, her mind weary and anxious. Everything inside of her wanted to demonstrate her unrelenting love for Jesus. So after she and her friends experienced the sunset of the Sabbath, they slept... little did they know when they awoke they would be the first eye witnesses of the greatest story ever told.

The next morning they rose up early and went to the place where Jesus' body was laid. Their arms were loaded with spices and anointment to complete a proper burial for their beloved Rabbi, wondering, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3). Approaching with caution not knowing what they would do, they "found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 24:2-3). And the next words from the angels would change the world forever, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." (v. 5-6)

This Easter let your hearts be in awe and wonder. Jesus of Nazareth came to set you free from sin like he set Mary of Magdalene free from the chains that kept her in prison. He is calling you to know him, follow him, be changed by him and live on mission, telling the world about Him. And just like he chose Mary to be his first witness, he's calling you to be a witness of this incredible news.

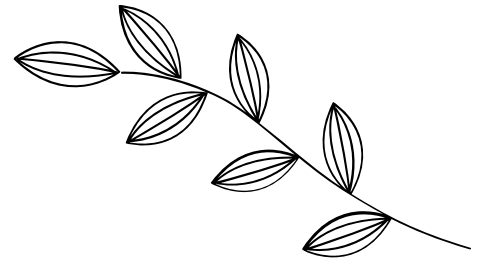
PRAYER

Lord, I worship you today as my risen Savior. You made victory over sin and death possible through your death, burial and resurrection. Please help me to live every day in that victory and help me to take every opportunity to tell the good news about you everywhere I go. Amen.



April 11

by Kaela Wolters



READING
Mark 9:24

HELP MY UNBELIEF

The man had seen Jesus' power in action. He had heard stories of and seen with his own eyes the power of Jesus. He had experienced it with his very own senses. And yet, there was still a fear that gripped his heart, a cloud of doubt that lingered. "All things are possible for the one who believes," was Jesus' promise. Yet all words that the man could utter were "I believe; help my unbelief".

How can this statement be true? How can we believe, yet still remain in unbelief? While this is an oxymoron, our hearts know this sentiment well. We have seen the works of God, we have beheld the empty tomb. We understand that God is all-powerful, and that He can do all things. And yet with the empty tomb before our eyes, our hearts begin to doubt who we know God to be.

Though it may be paradoxical, these words "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief" reveal a heart that recognizes its frailty and understands that Jesus is the only One to grant faith. This man had heard Jesus's rebuke toward the disciples, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" (Mark 9:19).

The man could have said, “Yes, I believe, I have faith!” and muscled his way into faith. And yet this man understood something profound. Faith was not a product of his own effort. It was a gift that could only be granted to him. When we try to “just have more faith”, we fail to understand a key component of the Gospel. We know that we are saved by grace through faith. However, Ephesians 2:8 has an important detail we cannot miss, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”. The faith that was required for the man’s son to be healed, and likewise the faith required for us to be saved, is a gift that is granted only through God.

One commentator writes, “Faith requires humble trust. The father comes to Jesus hesitantly, not with a bold swagger, and humbly stammers his plea. He does not ask for some sign from heaven to jump-start his faith but turns his empty hands toward God and asks God to fill them.” The man’s humble request is granted, as his heart is postured to receive a faith the only Christ can fulfill.

This Easter as we look upon the empty tomb, and doubts begin to fill our hearts and minds, may we turn to the One who can grant us the faith we need. Because He is good. And He, ultimately, is our Faithful Father.

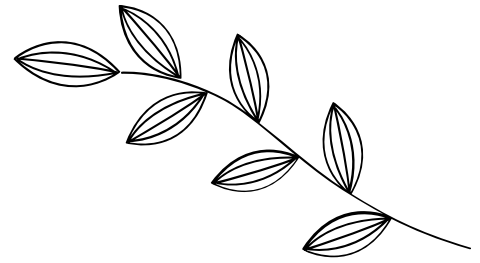
PRAYER

Lord, as I come into your presence, I have so many doubts and questions that fill my heart and rob me from living in the joy of my salvation. Sometimes I am overwhelmed by the weight of my own inadequacy. Jesus, give me faith. Give me an unshakable trust in who you are. In your precious name, Amen.



April 12

by Lisa Kaiser



READING

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

WHERE IS YOUR STING?!

Christ's resurrection broke the power of death for those who believe in Him- Hallelujah!

Death left its sting in Christ, like the way a bee leaves its stinger in its victim. Just as a bee dies once its stinger is removed, death died once its sting was left in Christ.

Though death seems to be the enemy for all men, as believers, we do not need to fear it. Death is our old enemy. Our sin has been covered by the blood of Jesus, so it is not a fatal blow. Death is not gone, but its sting is gone!

I recently had the great honor and privilege of caring for two hospice patients during their last days. Both of these men were godly, Jesus-loving men, who had lived their lives surrendered to the Lord. Though they were physically suffering, they both rehearsed the goodness of God as they longed to see His face soon. What a gift it was to me to watch as family members came and read Scripture, sang hymns and spent time with their loved one even through their grief. Their memorial services told stories of lives that had been touched by their love for Christ and desire to have others know Him as well. Intermixed with the grief was celebration and hope, because death's sting did not have the final say.

Colleen Chao, a young mother suffering from terminal cancer writes this, “Death is our ever-present reality. Brevity is our new normal. I am inches away from the realities we’ve talked of for years. Although I’m longing to be with my Forever Love, nothing in me wants to prematurely leave my husband and son, leave them behind to grieve and suffer after my suffering is done. But the reality is, home is breathtakingly close for them, too. For a time, suffering may make their days feel long and terrible, but in the end, it will all be the same to us- and we will be in His presence forever and ever and ever.” Colleen and her family know the hope of the gospel and do not feel death’s final sting.

But what about those who do not know of this hope? Death’s sting tragically remains forever for them. The verse that follows this passage tells us to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58) The apostle Paul had one reason for wanting to remain on earth - to share the gospel by pouring his life out for others. May we have this same desire!

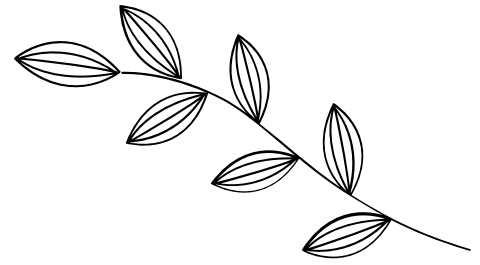
PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, thank you for your victory over sin and death! We are undeserving of your grace and mercy. Help us to have eyes to see those who do not have the hope of the gospel. Give us boldness to share of your transforming power in our lives!”



April 13

by Scott Green



READING
Hebrews 1:2-3

HE IS SEATED

As we reflect on the person and work of Jesus Christ this Easter season, I can think of no better place to turn to see how much better Jesus is than any sacrifice, any prophet, any priest, or any king, than the opening verses of Hebrews chapter 1.

Jesus is a Better Prophet

Prophets were those who spoke (v.2) to God's people on behalf of God himself. Who better to pronounce the message of God than God's own son and heir? Jesus doesn't merely reflect God to us, for to reflect God's glory is to reflect a light that is not your own. The moon reflects the light of the sun, but it is not the source of that light. Jesus Christ is the very radiance of God's glory to us, meaning he radiates the light himself. He is the same source of glory as the Father, meaning that he is also the exact imprint of God to us. We don't have to look at Jesus and wonder if we truly can know God's heart and character, it is on full display in the person of Jesus Christ! God has spoken, in the past it was through flawed prophets, but today we look to Jesus, the perfect representation of God, His very Son and heir, His very radiance in our lives!

Jesus is a Better Priest

Old Testament Priests were the mediators between God and Israel. Day after day, year after year, they brought sacrifices to God on behalf of the people to cleanse and purify them of their sin through the shedding of blood. The sacrificial system was a visible reminder to the people of the seriousness of our sin and our need to be washed and purified. The Son of God offered one sacrifice, himself, as the spotless lamb of God, to God for all time. Through his sacrifice he has made purification for our sins once and for all. We don't need to bring any other sacrifice; we don't need any other priest. For those who have placed their trust in Jesus, He has washed us clean!

Jesus is the Perfect King

After accomplishing his priestly work or making purification for our sins, we see this statement at the end of verse 3 that Jesus sits down at the right hand of God. If you've ever had a long day of work that was exhausting and draining, and after finishing that work you went home and plopped onto your favorite couch letting out a big sigh. I imagine Jesus doing something like that. The work for Jesus was tiring, painful, and grueling work, but now he is able to sit down having accomplished what he set out to do. The difference is, while we might plop into our comfiest couch exhausted, Jesus is not exhausted, he is seated as King. Jesus' work was to win himself a kingdom and in returning victorious, he sits to rule and reign over what he has won for himself.

Jesus finished his work of salvation and now is seated as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He doesn't stand in heaven pacing back and forth, worried about whether or not his work is done or if it will succeed. He has succeeded, his work is finished, He rules and reigns, HE IS SEATED!

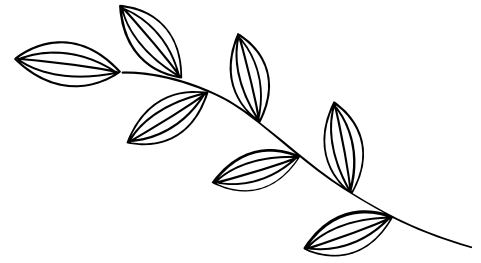
PRAYER

Father Almighty, thank you for the gift of your Son. Thank you that when we look to Him that we can hear more clearly from Him about who You are than any prophet. Thank you that through His offering we have the perfect once for all sacrifice that has washed us pure once and for all. Thank you that He now is seated with you in majesty ruling and reigning over the kingdom that He won of which I am now a citizen!



April 14

by Luke Salik



READING
1 Corinthians 16:22

MARANATHA!

Have you ever experienced whiplash? Whiplash results from—typically your neck—bending forcefully forward and then backward, or vice versa. Stiffness, numbness, pain, blurred vision, and more are often the physical symptoms.

Just 43 days before Jesus ascended into heaven, he was crucified and buried in a tomb. Even though Jesus prepared them for this moment, repeatedly prophesying his own death and resurrection, they were devastated, confused, and scared. They watched the Messiah they hoped for—and their dear friend—perish before their eyes. Whiplash. Following their king for years, watching him perform the impossible and hearing him teach with an authority that could only be explained by his divinity, only to see him viciously crushed on a cross? It's no wonder why they lamented, "But we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21). Numbness. Pain. Blurred vision. "What do we do now?"

But then an explosion of joy erupted from their hearts when Jesus rose and made himself known to them. What a display of victory over sin and death, bringing peace and new resolve! Amazing.

But they didn't know that a second whiplash was coming. Jesus was not there to stay.

He was taken "out of their sight" (v 9) and "from them." (v 11). It's not difficult to imagine the state of their hearts as they were "looking on" and "gazing into heaven." What just happened? Gone again?

Perhaps you can relate. Maybe you feel Jesus is distant and out of sight. Maybe the wait for his return to make all things new feels too difficult. Maybe his return even feels unbelievable right now.

Let us be instructed and consoled by the white-robed men. "Why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus...will come in the same way you saw him go." In other words, they spoke into the disciples' concern and paralysis, saying, "Don't worry! He will come back! And there's work to do in the meantime!"

Don't Worry! He Will Come Back!

Let Jesus's return from the grave strengthen your certainty that he will return from heaven. What Jesus says he will do, he will do. No matter how impossible it seems or how long the wait, he will come through on his promises to us. And when he returns, this time it will be for good. He will stay with us forever. Come, Lord Jesus!

There's Work to Do in the Meantime

Knowing Jesus will return gives us the courage to look away from the window of waiting and put our hands to the plow. This doesn't mean our longing and eager waiting for him stops.

We simply must keep before us the words Jesus gave in the verse directly preceding this passage (Acts 1:8), that the Spirit of Christ will be with us, and we are to be his witnesses to all the world as we wait.

PRAYER

Jesus, we long for your return. Come quickly! And as we wait, give us the boldness to be your witnesses. Amen.



