



HOLY WEEK

MONDAY | ZEAL

Yesterday was Sunday, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey through the Eastern Gate and into the temple to be examined by the people for the next four days. This wouldn't be significant, except that Sunday was the day on which the High Priest was to bring in the Passover Lamb, the lamb without blemish, the lamb to be sacrificed for the people. He was to bring this lamb through the Eastern gate and into the temple. The lamb was to be tied up in the temple and examined for four days to see whether it was truly without blemish and perfect. Then, it was slaughtered for the sins of the people.

Today, he goes to the temple again. The atmosphere is electric. Jews from all over Israel have packed into this city for their Holy Week, and the temple is the prime attraction. It is the only place where God's presence resides on earth and where God meets with his people. When Jesus arrives, though, he does not find a place of worship, but a bazaar. His Father's house is filled, not with worshippers, but opportunists looking to make money off of the crowds. And, for the second time in his short 3-year ministry, Jesus does the unthinkable. In what probably seemed like the fury of a madman, he drives out the salesmen, overturning tables and chairs, coins flying, pigeons squawking. Why? Out of a zeal for his Father's house, a passion to preserve the presence of prayer in God's people.

1. Read Mark 11:15–19. Does this seem uncharacteristic of Jesus to you? Why?
2. What does Jesus demonstrate about the character of God through this scene?

Five days from now, Jesus is going to die, and when he dies the curtain in the temple is torn in two showing that there is no longer a divide between God and man. Now we are God's temple, his meeting place, the place where his presence resides on earth. God's people are filled with the Holy Spirit in the same way that the temple was 2000 years ago.

3. Read James 4:4–5. James describes God as having the same type of zeal for the purity our hearts as Jesus had for the purity of the temple. Do you guard your heart from loving other things with this same zeal?
4. What priorities of your heart might God be yearning jealously over because you have placed them above him?
5. What does it look like this week for you to cleanse your heart of an over-love for these things with the same unabashed zeal with which Jesus cleansed the temple?

Seven hundred years before this, Isaiah prophesied that the Savior would be born, conquer and reign with the "zeal of the Lord of Hosts." Jesus' zeal wasn't merely a one-time flare up, but a manifestation of the zealous heart of God to rescue his people, redeem his world, and restore all creation.

6. Read Isaiah 9:6–7. Spend time now meditating on and worshipping God for his zeal for his people, his zeal for you.

TUESDAY | GLORY

Jesus has been in Jerusalem two days and is surrounded by a huge Jewish crowd. His followers, interested spectators, and the religious elite all want face time with Jesus. They want to hear him, challenge him, see him do something cool. Then out of left field comes this group of Gentiles, Greeks. Who knows what they are doing in Jerusalem during this Jewish Holy Week, but they're here and they want to see Jesus. So, Philip relays the message, and Jesus, rather than answering him, goes off on some teaching about fruitfulness and dying, hating the world and eternal life. Then, as he begins talking about his own death, Jesus prays out loud saying, "Father, glorify your name" and out of nowhere a voice booms out of the sky and answers him! The voice says, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd is thrown into confusion; the cynical are rationalizing it, claiming it must have been thunder. The super-spiritual are over-spiritualizing it and taking it beyond what it clearly was, claiming it was an angelic visitation. At the end of it all, though, the response is the same, unbelief. He never answered the Greeks who wanted to see him. Then again, maybe he did. Maybe he was showing these Greeks that in a few days, they would see the glory of God. Not in healings, teachings or miracles, but in the God of the cross, the God of the empty tomb.

1. Read John 12:20–33. When it comes to things of God you can't explain, do you tend to be cynical (those who claimed it was thunder) or do you tend to be super-spiritual (those who claimed an angelic visitation)? How does this effect the way you see God?
2. Think about what Jesus is saying in verses 27–33; that the way that he is demonstrating the glory of God is by dying as a common criminal and being hung on a sinner's cross. What does this show you about God that the pinnacle of his glory is the cross?

There is another group of people that slip into the end of the narrative. They saw the glory of God and believed. They could no longer deny that this was not just a man but the Son of Man, God Incarnate, the Messiah. They believed, but no one would have known it at the time. They were afraid. Afraid of God? No, afraid of man. In fact, in love with other's opinion of them. John writes in verse 43, "...they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."

3. Let that statement take aim at your heart. Which do you choose on a day to day basis: the glory that comes from God's "well done" on your life or the glory that comes from other people's "well done"?
4. Why is it hard for you to seek the glory that comes from God rather than the glory that comes from man?
5. What might it look like in your daily life to lift your eyes to seek the glory of God on your life rather than the glory of man?

But this is not the end of the story for us. There is incredible joy in seeking to please God and not man but not in the way that we often think. Joy for the Christian is found in seeking to please the One who is already pleased with you. John got it at the beginning of his book. He was an eyewitness to the incomparable glory of Jesus, and yet he said, "from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." Grace is the free gift of the favor of God. The cross switches the script for the Christian. Jesus takes the Father's frown for us, and we step into God's good grace.

6. Read John 1:14–16. Spend time now meditating on God's free gift of his favor to you and worship God for his amazing glory.

WEDNESDAY | ANOINTED

Jesus and his disciples had gone back to Bethany on Wednesday evening. They wanted to get away from the madness of Jerusalem and the massive crowds. Simon had invited them to his house for dinner, and now they were at the table, enjoying a meal. After a few minutes, there's a knock at the door, and a woman comes in the room carrying a few years' worth of retirement in the form of an ornate jar of expensive perfume. The disciples are ecstatic. Clearly, she's going to give this to Jesus. They are already calculating all that it could do for Jesus' ministry. She walks up to Jesus, but he doesn't reach out his hands to take it from her. Neither of them says anything. Then, out of nowhere, to the shock and dismay of the room, she breaks off the sealed lid of the jar on the edge of the table. Does she know what she's doing? That jar is worthless now! At least the perfume is still there. That will be worth something. Nothing prepares them for what they see next. She pours the perfume out on Jesus' head. All of it. Before they know it, it's flowing down his cloak and onto the ground. What a terrible waste! Now they're furious, and they let the woman know it. They call her to account. But, Jesus answers instead of her. They're expecting him to rebuke her or miraculously heal the jar or something. Instead he looks straight at the disciples and rebukes them. In fact, he calls this waste beautiful. They don't understand.

1. Read Matthew 26:6-13. Do you find yourself sympathizing with the disciples' reaction to the woman? Why or why not?
2. What does this change about your perspective on worship that Jesus looked at this extravagant waste and considered it beautiful?

In two days, there will be an even more extravagant waste. An extravagant waste like the world has never before and will never again experience. Jesus on a cross. The Healer, Comforter, Peacemaker, Redeemer, Friend of Sinners, King of the Earth, dead on a cross. Yet, without this waste, we would face God's wrath, separated by our sin from our holy God. God wasted himself on a cross for you.

3. Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Think about Paul's perspective here. He saw his life as given to him in order to be poured out for the glory of God. He had no limits to what he would give. At what point do you start to consider time, energy, money, and resources given to God as a waste?
4. There are two main ways that we can change our willingness to pour out our time, energy, money, and resources to God. The first is to look at what he has poured out for us. Take some time and thank God for what he gave to buy you out of your sin.
5. The next is to actively give to God things that stretch us. When we are extravagant in our worship, it changes the way we view God's worth. How can you be extravagantly sacrificial in your worship to God this week?

Jesus didn't view this as beautiful just because it was extravagant worship, though. There are two other things pictured here. Pouring perfume on someone's head seems like an odd thing, and it was. Except that it was how a Jewish priest or king would be anointed. Jesus is both our King of Kings and Great High Priest. But they would have used oil for anointing. She used perfume, Mark tells us it's nard, which is a burial perfume. She is anointing Jesus as our Great High Priest and King of Kings, who is going to die for the sake of his people.

6. Spend some time thanking and worshipping God that he would be willing to go to the cross for our sake. Pray and ask him for a heart that considers him worthy of your all.

THURSDAY | LAMB

It's the pinnacle of the week, the Passover meal, and they're all gathered into a room to eat it together. They've done this every year of their lives, but today seems different, more significant. As Jesus is telling the story of the Passover, it almost seems like he was there. The slavery in Egypt, the refusals of Pharaoh, the horrible plagues. Then, God passing through Egypt in judgment; bringing death to every family who was not righteous, every family. Then, the remedy. The perfect lamb. Slaughtered. It's blood spread over the doorframe of every house, as if to say, "This lamb who deserves life gets our death; we who deserve death gain his life." Then, the night comes. Everyone hoping their lamb was spotless; hoping that this works. Then there's darkness, loud cries and death but not from Israel, not from those covered by the blood of the lamb. The next morning, they're free. The Lamb bought their life and their freedom. Jesus finishes the story.

1. Read Exodus 12:1-13 & John 1:36. Write out the connections you see between the lamb of Exodus 12 and Jesus.
2. Freedom and forgiveness were bought for the Israelites once and for all that night of the Passover in the same way that our freedom and forgiveness were bought once and for all by Christ on the cross. Do you find yourself sometimes feeling like you have to continually earn your forgiveness or freedom from your sin on your own?

Every day this week Jesus has referenced his own death in some way. Tonight is no exception. He calls the disciples together and performs what would later be called the Lord's Supper, in which they drink wine symbolizing his spilled blood and eat bread symbolizing his broken body. Why did they have to eat it and drink it? Why couldn't they just watch?

3. Read Matthew 26:26-29. What do you think are some of the reasons that Communion is so vital in the life of the church?
4. We don't just observe Jesus on the cross, but we receive it, take part in it, and our souls are nourished by it. What difference would it make in your life if you were to daily remember the gospel and the freedom and forgiveness you have because of Christ?
5. How might you begin make a daily habit of remembering his broken body and spilled blood: "Jesus in your place and you in his"?

This is the whole point of the Gospel: Jesus in my place and I in his. The problem is that we don't think we are bad enough to deserve judgment. We also think we can make our own way if we just get a little shove in the right direction. We look at the story of the Passover and think that the Egyptians got the death that they deserved, while the Israelites got the freedom that they deserved. But that's not how it works. All have sinned and falls short of the glory of God. All. Except one. The lamb.

6. Read Isaiah 53:6-7. Spend a moment meditating on the penalty of your own sin, and your total inability to affect your own salvation. Ask God to give you eyes to see this. Then, worship Christ for being the Lamb slaughtered in your place.

FRIDAY | FORSAKEN

It's getting late on Thursday night. Jesus finished what would become known as The Last Supper with his disciples and now he wants to go to his prayer spot in a garden down the road. The disciples, less Judas, accompany him amidst yawns and mutters of frustration; this is going to be a long night. They were right. They fall asleep while Jesus is praying because they're exhausted and it's looking like he might pray until morning. Then they hear people coming. There shouldn't be anyone else out at this time of night. Not here. But before they know it the garden is lit up like a party and there is a whole company of soldiers led by Judas. They arrest Jesus. He just lets them arrest him. What's happening? Not knowing what else to do, they panic and run. Peter does a loop and follows Jesus into the court of the Chief Priest. It's getting near sunup now and he's hoping that he's dreaming. Maybe if he gets close enough, he can hear what they're saying. Out of nowhere, a little girl asks him if he knows Jesus. Peter says 'no' and dismisses her. He doesn't think anything of it. He's the only one risking his neck to stick with Jesus anyway. Then it happens twice more. Then the rooster crows to bring in the morning, and Jesus turns and looks at him. Now he's sick to his stomach. Jesus, forsaken by his friends.

1. Read Luke 22:54-62. Have you ever had times when you have hidden your relationship with Christ and justified it at "means to an end"?
2. Spend a moment to reflect on Jesus, totally alone and forsaken by his friends and followers, heading to the cross.

Pilate is confused. He gets woken up early to decide the fate of a man he knows to be innocent. But he also knows that he has been causing chaos in his constituency. The Jewish leaders hate him and want him dead. The crowds love him; on Sunday, they were treating him like he was some kind of god. It's a lose-lose situation, so decides to take the easy way out and send the decision to the crowd who's already gathered early around his house. They love Jesus. But it goes terribly wrong. The crowds are now crying 'crucify!' at the same man they were shouting 'Savior!' to on Sunday. He doesn't know what else to do, so he capitulates to their cry and releases Jesus to be crucified. Jesus, forsaken by his followers.

3. Read Mark 15:1-20. Reflect on the fickleness of the crowds, who completely turned on him in the space of 5 days. How have you seen fickleness in your commitment to Christ?

John is at the cross watching in horror and disbelief. Jesus, naked, bleeding, dying, is hanging on the cross between two filthy criminals. He can't last much longer, and John is quickly giving up hope that God will pull him down off the cross. But surely. God is with him. He'll get him down. Then, Jesus cries something out. It's clear, but John still can't believe his ears. Forsaken! God? Forsake Jesus. No, surely not. Then Jesus dies. Your God, dead on a cross. Jesus, forsaken by his God.

4. Read Mark 15:21-41. Reflect on the fact that God turned away from Jesus in his innocence so that he could turn towards you in your sin. Spend a moment worshipping God for his mercy.

The criminal dying next to Jesus looks over, and, in his last hour of life, sees what he has never seen. The pure and undefiled Love of God hanging in front of his eyes. And when everyone else abandons Jesus, he owns him. A miracle of repentance. He knows it won't change anything, for he deserves the hell he's heading towards. And Jesus, smiling through the pain, owns him back. The greater miracle.

5. Read Luke 23:39-43. Reflect on the tragedy of the religious people's rejection of Jesus, and the beauty of this sinner's repentance. Do you see yourself more in the pride of the Jews or the brokenness of the sinner?
6. Take a moment and worship God that he would save a sinner like you.

SATURDAY | SILENCE

Saturday's here and the silence seems surreal. It's the day of rest for the Jews in Jerusalem, and they rest in their homes and hotel rooms. The crowds are no longer thronging around Jesus because Jesus is locked in a stone tomb, dead. Jesus' followers aren't speaking to one another. They have nothing to say. They just knew he would escape the arrest. They knew he would be released from the trumped-up charges. They knew he would come down off the cross. They just knew it couldn't be. But it was. Their Messiah, the man who they gave up everything to follow, the King of Israel, dead. Through the silence of the Sabbath their souls are searching, "Why? How? What now?" But there is no one to answer them. No teacher to tell them truth. No leader to walk their weary hearts through the fog.

1. Read Luke 23:56. Have you ever had a time when you were disappointed by God because he didn't come through on something you thought he surely would?
2. Read Isaiah 53:7-10. Though Jesus' death blindsided his followers, it was prophesied about him hundreds of years before. What's your reaction to verse 10 as Isaiah prophesies Jesus' death, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him, he has brought him to grief"?

A few weeks before this, the disciples are their way to Jerusalem for the Passover, and Jesus pulls his disciples aside from the crowd to tell them something pressing, something they need to hear. He says, "see, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." This is the third time he has told them this, but they don't believe him. Maybe he's kidding or maybe it's one of those confusing parables he's telling again, but he can't be serious because God wouldn't do that to his Son!

3. Read Isaiah 53:10 again. Think about the horrible evils of the cross. The most innocent of all innocents condemned to be tortured, to be shamed and to die as the most guilty. Is it hard to believe that this was the purpose and will of God?
4. How do you react when things happen in your life or in our world that you don't fit your concept of "the will of God?"
5. What might it look like for you to actively trust God through suffering, confusion, and the unknowns of life in a fallen and sin-cursed world?

Do we get the answer? Does God tell us the reason he crushed his Son on the cross or are we left to accept it in the dark? He does. All of Scripture he does, but it's written in plain sight in the most popular Bible Verse of this generation. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." God crushed his Son out of love for you, love for me, love for this world. That's the big "why." It was the only way to redeem his children from the ransom of their rebellion and pay the punishment due for their crimes.

6. Read John 3:16. Take some time now in silence. Meditate on the breaking of Jesus so that you could be mended. The loss of Jesus so that you could be found. The death of Jesus so that you could be made alive.



EASTER

SUNDAY | JOY

Their eyes were seeing it, but their minds were not processing it yet. How could they? They knew Jesus was dead. Earlier that day, the women had come in with some ridiculous story about that impossibly large stone being rolled back and Jesus' body being gone. Then Mary comes and tells them that she actually spoke to Jesus herself. Peter fell for it, but there's no way the rest of them would be taken in... again. They had believed Jesus that he was the Messiah, and now he's dead. They weren't going to be deceived again. But now, they don't know what to believe because Jesus is standing in front of them. But it can't be. They had watched as he was wrapped in burial clothes. They all had laid him in the tomb themselves. They had seen several soldiers roll the stone across the entrance. They had grieved through the Sabbath for him. But now their minds are racing. Their hearts wanted to rejoice, but their minds wouldn't let them. Surely, this can't be. But it was.

1. Read Luke 24:1-12, 36-49. Luke says, "they disbelieved for joy." Have you ever had an experience like this where you wanted something to happen so badly that when it came you didn't believe it?
2. It wasn't merely that they got their friend back. They had begun to question everything that they had believed. Think about the relief and joy they would have felt to see Jesus. Spend a moment to put yourself in their shoes and think through how that must have felt.

We don't get the chance to see Jesus, to walk with him, to hear him teach, to mourn his death, to rejoice in his life. It's hard to put ourselves there when we're comfortable here. It's difficult to feel the joy of Sunday when we never knew Jesus dead and not risen. But we can grasp these things by faith. As Peter says in writing to people who never saw Jesus with their own eyes, "you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory."

3. What is your emotional response to the resurrection? (This not to fill us with guilt from where we think we should be, but to figure out where we are right now)
4. Read 1 Peter 1:8. This is written to people like us who didn't see Jesus with their own eyes. Pray that God will give you a heart that rejoices with this kind of joy at the Gospel.

Besides the disciples' joy at seeing the risen Christ and our joy at believing in him, there is one more significant joy resulting from the cross. Jesus' joy in dying. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him. What joy could Christ possibly find in the cross? It was the joy of, in one single moment, giving inestimable glory to God. It was the joy of reconciling a family to the Father, It was the joy of ransoming rebels from their self-inflicted slavery to sin. It was the joy of welcoming weary saints into the unfathomable beauty of heaven. It was a rejoicing over the church, and it made the cross worth it.

5. Read Hebrews 12:1-2. Take a moment to meditate on the fact that Jesus deliberately went to the cross and took your punishment and shame and considered it joy. Spend time worshipping God for this.
6. There's also a joy set before us. The joy of seeing our Savior face-to-face in ever-lasting joy. And out of this joy, the Christian is called to run a race that will be difficult, painful, self-denying, and shameful. Ask God to give you grace to look at Jesus in order to run your race with endurance...and joy.