

The Last Week of Jesus Christ

PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

It's Monday

The day after the "Triumphal Entry" or "Palm Sunday" Jesus again enters Jerusalem in the morning, but this time he is walking. There is no ceremony, no joyful cheers, just a fig tree that will serve as a living parable. It was early and Jesus was hungry (Matt. 21:18-22). Upon investigating the tree, Jesus sees that the tree had not produced figs. It was common knowledge that fig trees would not produce edible figs for about six more weeks. All that could be expected at this time was a bland fruit that would not ripen until late in May. These figs were called "early" figs and were known to precede the main crop of "late" figs that would grow in mid-August and into October. So why is Jesus cursing the tree that naturally shouldn't have ripe fruit and how does it relate to the Passion Week?

The key is found in a closer inspection of the fig tree. If only leaves appeared on the tree and no early figs then the tree would not produce any figs that year - early or late. Jesus' point is that people are like trees that seem from a distance to have good fruit (c.f. Jer. 24), but upon closer inspection show no sign of producing fruit at all. These types of trees and people can only lead to disappointment for the hungry and judgment from God. This is precisely the picture Jesus is painting by cursing the tree.

Jerusalem was a type of fig tree. From a distance it seemed like the people were moving toward bearing ripe fruit (Matt. 21:8-9), but upon further investigation they only had leaves of religiosity (Matt. 21:12-17). The people of Jerusalem were rich with religious activity in preparation for the upcoming Passover meal, but bankrupt of true spiritual devotion to the Messiah of God now standing among them.

It was on this day that the disciples would purchase a lamb for Passover which was to begin at twilight on Friday evening as prescribed in Exodus 12:1-6. It was the 10th of Nissan (the first month of the Jewish calendar) and there would be thousands of people purchasing a lamb from the local vendors. They would then care for and observe it for defects for four days. Any defect would eliminate it from being able to serve as a Passover lamb. If it proved to be worthy, the one year old lamb would be sacrificed on the 14th of Nissan as a remembrance of God choosing to "pass-over" those who had the blood of the lamb applied to the entrance of their homes (see Exodus 12:1-14).

How ironic that the Lamb of God, chosen before the foundations of the world (see I Peter 1:20), would be involved in choosing a lamb for His twelve disciples. I wonder what Jesus thought as the disciples discussed the merits of the potential lambs. Imagine the scene: Simon says, "It's too small." The sheep chosen would have to feed the entire twelve during the Passover meal. John says, "Are those spots on the left side?" According to the Law, the lamb could not have spots or defects. During the entire evaluation process the lamb they really needed had been with them all along.

Jesus would also interact with some Greeks who had, seemingly, converted to Judaism and wanted to speak with Him (see John 12:20-36). How tragic that the people who were to receive Christ as Messiah refused Him while those who were not apart of the covenant clamored to meet with Him.

Then, leaving Jerusalem, the disciples notice that the fig tree from the morning had withered - a stark reminder of the penalty for missing Christ.



PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

It's Tuesday

It is now Tuesday in the Passion Week of Christ. Jesus goes back into Jerusalem (Mark 11:27) and is immediately challenged by the religious leaders of the day: By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority? (see Matt. 21:23). These two questions set off a theological explosion since these two inquiries focus on the epicenter of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, the true identity of Jesus Christ. It is easy to expose what the religious leaders of the day thought of Christ since they viewed Jesus' authority as fake, a simple poser that needed to be exposed as a heretic. It is now clear that the religious leaders refuse to see that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God (see Matthew 9:1-8; John 9). Therefore, Jesus begins to dismantle the life and practice of the Pharisees and religious leaders in an effort to clearly expose them for what they are - spiritual counterfeits.

Round One

Jesus silences the Sadducees by exposing their ignorance (Matt. 22:29-33).

Round Two

The Pharisees seek to do to Jesus what He had done to the Sadducees - confuse and expose Him as a fraud by asking questions regarding their specialty, the Law of Moses (Matt. 22:34-40). When their objective failed, Jesus takes advantage of the opportunity and begins to ask them questions regarding the identity of the Messiah (Matt. 22:41-45).

Because the Pharisees had rejected Christ, they could not see the mind-bending reality that the Messiah Jesus was speaking about was the same Jesus standing in front of them posing the question!

The principle is abundantly clear: The Pharisees are physically silenced because they are spiritually blind (Matt. 22:46).

Round Three

Jesus rails against the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. Jesus sets out to expose the "religious" leaders (Matt. 23:1-39).

As Jesus is leaving Jerusalem the disciples call attention to the Temple building. Jesus then begins to address the coming judgment. Jesus then prepares his disciples regarding the signs of end by wrapping information around the two questions posed by his Apostles: When will this happen and what will be the sign of you coming and the end of the age? (Matt. 24-25).

Jesus then leaves Jerusalem and travels to Bethany (approx. 2.2 miles away) to spend time in the home of Simon the Leper (see Mark 14:3).

As I meditate on these truths, I am amazed at His focus and intensity. Jesus refused to be discouraged or dissuaded from following the road to the cross. Take time to voice your adoration to Jesus and ask Him to lead you into the lives of people who desperately need Him today.

What two questions set off a theological explosion and served as the epicenter of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders?

Share with others what God is teaching you.

As God moves through you during your times of meditation this week, please consider sharing your thoughts and feelings on our web site - www.forGodsFame.org.

God often uses community interaction to drive us deeper in our understanding and perception of His Word.

We have set up a blog post entitled "Lessons from the Last Week of Jesus Christ." This post will serve a type of community "thank you" to the Lord as we move through the Passion Week. Take time to write, read and reflect on the goodness of our great God.



It's Wednesday

Wednesday of the Passion Week is often called "Silent Wednesday." The dominant thought about this day was that it served as the day Judas used for arranging the betrayal of Jesus. It seems appropriate that a man who sought riches through betrayal of the Messiah sent from God would receive silence as his reward.

Judas Iscariot is a tragic figure

Judas is derived from Judah, which means "Jehovah leads." Is there a more paradoxical name given in history? We know that Judas was from Judah (southern Israel) from the fact that his last name is a geographic reference. Judas' last name is Iscariot, which is a compound word made up of "ish" (man) and "Kerioth" - a city in southern Judea see Joshua 15:25). Therefore, Judas is the "man from Kerioth." Out of the twelve disciples, Judas was the only disciple who did not come from the Galilee region. Kerioth was in Judah. Judah was known for its affluence and, therefore, Judas was most likely was from an affluent culture. For this reason, it is understandable that Judas was given charge of overseeing the treasury for the disciples (see John 12:6). All of the other disciples were somehow connected to one another prior to following Christ (a brother, friend, family member), but the connection Judas had is a mystery. How and when did he begin to follow Jesus? We simply do not know.

Judas must have seemed very spiritual

Judas healed people. Judas stayed with Christ when the crowd left (John 6:66-71). When Jesus spoke of betrayal at the Last Supper, not one of the disciples seemed to consider Judas to be the one who would betray Him (see John 13:21-25). As a matter of fact, Judas is never mentioned by any of the other disciples as being deficient in faith in any way. Other than Christ (see John 6:64), Judas was a master of hypocrisy!

What would drive Judas to betray Christ?

It seems that the root issue was money. Judas had followed Christ for three years. Judas had endured persecution, hunger, endless talks from Jesus around the fire, a life abandoned to the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven, and for what? Jesus was now speaking of leaving and death (see Matt.26:2). How could Judas redeem the three years he had put in? He was a known follower of Christ and that type of reputation would follow him. Judas had hitched his wagon to Christ, and now it was clear Jesus was not going to restore the powerful Kingdom that had been long anticipated and Judas would soon be on the run. Judas needed a nest egg and fast. Since Judas had seen Jesus face a hostile mob and simply walk away when they tried to kill Him (see Luke 4:28-30), he must have thought betraying Christ would lead to one more opportunity for Jesus to escape but this time Judas would be the richer for it, thirty pieces of silver richer! Judas made his way to those who would pay the most, the religious leaders who hated Jesus with a passion (see Matt. 12:14). It must have seemed like the perfect plan!

Judas was self-deluding

Tragically, Judas did not realize a fundamental problem with sin - it creates an alternate reality based on personal desire. When Judas began to strategize how to sin against Christ he entered the world of personal delusion. He began to forge his own reality based on how to get what he most wanted. He constructed an imaginary world in which He would win.

The world is replete with people who thought they could get away with something, but only find themselves wondering how they could have been so wrong or, even worse, trying to figure out how to not get caught the next time! For Judas there was no next time. Judas was living in the moment. Judas did get an outcome for his betrayal; Judas killed himself and his name is now forever associated with the spiritual bankrupt.

PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

In what ways do we seem spiritual and yet find our motivation leaning more in the direction of Judas than it is being sold-out for Jesus?



PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

It's Thursday

Thursday of the Passion Week invites us into the most intimate picture we have of Jesus with His disciples. After three years, Jesus and His disciples had formed a bond that was more than simply teacher/follower, they were now friends (see John 15:15). The emotions of the moment were thick. The air in Jerusalem was filled with religious activity since it was now the time of Passover. Jesus knew the time was short, but wanted to emblazon some final truths on the mind of His disciples, so that when He was gone from their side, they would know that they were still in His hands. At this point in the story we turn to the Apostle John, as he concentrates a large portion of his writing on the final events of the life of Christ.

Starting with John 13, we find the last day of Jesus involving:

- Washing the disciples' feet, a picture of how to serve (chap. 13).
- Confronting his betrayer - a picture of how Jesus was never fooled (13:21-32).
- Providing for the disciples - a picture of how Jesus provides for those who do and will follow Him (chap. 14).
- Instructions on how to bear fruit, abide in me - a picture of dependence (chap. 15).
- Outlining the role of the coming Counselor - the promise of a future (chap. 16)
- Praying to the Father on their behalf and for anyone who will believe (chap. 17), the reality of God's power to all who will entrust their lives to Him

Jesus then leaves the quiet solitude of this intimate setting and begins to make his way through the city. Although Jerusalem had swelled from an estimated 800,000 to over 2.5 million people, Jesus is alone. Sure, his disciples are walking with him. Yes, there probably were people with unique accents who had traveled from foreign lands echoing in the streets. Owners of local inns could have been finishing up haggling with the out-of-towners over the price to rent a room for the evening. There was certainly the bleating of hundreds of sheep coming in and out of the sheep gate, with shepherds yelling commands. There must have been discussion on the corner by some old men of how God instructed the children of Israel in the original Passover. While the travelers settled in, the noise of sheep was ringing in the alleys, rent was being agreed upon, and people discussed Moses and God's great work of deliverance; Jesus walks with his disciples through these streets to the garden to meet with His Father, because He can only truly rely on His Father in this moment.

Jesus leaves the city that has rejected him as King and walks down into the Kidron Valley. As He walks, Jesus crosses the stream that flowed in the bottom of the valley that had been by now turned to a crimson color, due to the blood from the sacrifices running down from the Temple mount into the stream. It is estimated that an animal had to be sacrificed every 4 seconds to provide for all the families in Jerusalem for the Passover meal. Jesus enters an olive grove, the Garden of Gethsemane - the common meeting area for Jesus and His disciples (John 18:1-2).

It is in moments like these that we find Jesus in the midst of our lives. When you are feeling alone, Jesus understands. When emotions of betrayal gnaw at your soul, Jesus knows your situation well. When reality hits and you learn that some people do not like you and there is really nothing you can do about it, it's good to know Jesus has traveled through this territory too.

I am grateful that Jesus refused to be a spectator. I am grateful that Jesus refused to play it safe. Jesus threw Himself into the game of life so that you could be assured that, although there are times when life seems incredibly out of control, Jesus understands and offers the grace to move forward in the midst of real heartache and pain.



PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

It's Friday

As you slept last night...

Jesus was betrayed in the Garden by one of his disciples, Judas (Luke 22:47-48). Jesus was then taken to the former high priest, Annas (John 18:13). Jesus, the King of the Jews, was bound and delivered to Caiaphas, the reigning high priest who just happens to be the son-in-law of Annas (wink, wink). Then Jesus was taken before the Sanhedrin, a group of top ranking religious leaders who were modeled after a council of elders that Moses convened to administer justice to keep Israel pure before their God (see Numbers 11:16). Jesus, the Son of God was bound by man, the creation of God. The entire series of events leads us into what is commonly called "Good Friday."

"Good" Friday?

Jesus must have looked powerless through the events of the night. He looked like a man broken or caught depending on which side you were on. However, throughout the ordeal, Jesus is reminding us that the role that He is portraying is submission to the Father's plan; it is not to be seen as a weakness on the part of Jesus to act against his captors. This is made clear when Peter is told by Jesus during His arrest in the garden, that he had at his disposal "twelve legions of angels" (see Matt. 26:52-54) who could immediately take control of the situation. It is interesting to note that a legion was comprised of 6,000 soldiers. Twelve angelic legions would be 72,000 angels! In 2 Kings 19:35 we read of one angel killing 185,000 men in Sennacherib's army in one night! Powerless? I don't think so. Jesus was playing a part and this is the way it had to be done; it was the will of the Father. Jesus indicates there is something greater being accomplished here - the Scriptures had to be fulfilled. Jesus was being driven by submission to the Father's plan to bring hope to mankind, not self-protection or personal comfort.

"Good" Friday?

In the morning, after the trial and initial beating by the "religious leaders," Jesus is taken to a civil trial in front of Pilate. Pilate is the Roman governor who was in Jerusalem due to the swell in population at the Passover feast. Pilate is charged with keeping the peace in this province. He treats Jesus like a hot-potato and passes Jesus to Herod Antipas - an Edumean, a descendent of Esau, the brother of Jacob (i.e., Israel). He then hands Jesus back to Pilate, who surrenders to the will of the people. Pilate washes his hands of Jesus' fate.

"Good" Friday?

Jesus is paraded through the streets, after being beaten... again. Jesus is directed to a hill outside of Jerusalem - the "hill" or "place of the skull." Jesus is nailed to a Roman cross which is then dropped into a hole in the ground. Jesus will hang on this cross and ask the Father to forgive those who have put him there. He doesn't call down insults or try to convince people of who He really is. Jesus simply does what He has always done - He reaches out to a criminal who hangs on a cross next to Him. You see, Jesus is determined to do the right thing; not the easy thing, not the most popular thing, the right thing. In this moment, to trust the Father is right. To reach out to a person in need is right. To forgive people who have nothing but hatred and malice in their hearts toward Him is right.

"Good" Friday?

Absolutely! Without Jesus acting in this way I would have no hope. Why? It is because I am the person who has malice in my heart. I am the person who hated Christ. I am the person who needs to be reached. In the actions of Jesus, I find hope to deal with my issues. I find a God who does not give me what I deserve, but meets me at my point of need. It is in my moment-by-moment need that I find the grace of God expressed to me through Jesus Christ.

GOOD FRIDAY!

"Jesus must have looked powerless through the events of the night."



It's Saturday

Jesus is dead. The disciples are stunned and scattered. The religious leaders are thanking God for exterminating one more religious nut while basking in the glow of self-righteousness. Mary rides the waves of her memories of Jesus... a baby... a young child... a young man... a son brutally killed! Jesus' family is reminding themselves that they pleaded with Jesus to not be so fanatical. They told Jesus things like: "Don't make enemies!" "Don't speak like that to our religious leaders!" "Jesus be patient, God has told us that He will send the Messiah to make things right." Now, they must have been left in mourning for all the things Jesus could have done to make things better... "Jesus, what were you thinking?" The crowd is resting. The Roman soldiers are doing their duty. Satan is boasting of his greatness while cursing the God of the universe. The demons are clamoring to make much of their victory in the defeat of Jesus.

The angels are waiting.

The Father is silent.

It's past the end and not quite the beginning.

It's Sunday

Jesus had a way of showing up in the midst of a crisis and making what seemed to be the end just the beginning. Today, we celebrate this hope in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. The subject of resurrection was nothing new to Jesus. Remember Lazarus? (see John 11). Jesus had been told Lazarus was sick, so he waited. A good friend... waiting... the ability to heal? This seemed very odd. When Jesus finally arrives, Lazarus has been dead four days. Four days of waiting is significant due to the popular Jewish teaching of the day that the soul would hover over and around the body for three days. In waiting four days, Jesus removes any doubt that Lazarus is dead. It seemed like the end for everyone, except Jesus. Upon arriving on the scene, Jesus tells Martha, the sister of Lazarus that her brother would live again. Martha, knowing

her Old Testament, relays that she knows he will on the last day (John 11:24), but Jesus says something that is shocking and turns what seems to be an end into a beginning.

Jesus says in v.25:

I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Jesus then shows he has the power to make this statement by calling Lazarus from the tomb. All of Jesus' identity hangs in the balance. If Lazarus doesn't come out, then Jesus is a fake. But, if Lazarus does come out, they are standing in the presence of man who can rightfully claim to be the Messiah sent from God to take away the sins of the world. Lazarus' end becomes a new beginning for him and legions of others who today realize not only what Jesus did for this man, but celebrate the fact that Jesus conquered death in rising from the grave. Jesus now changes the equation of the end. Due to the resurrection of Christ, what people think is the natural end is only the beginning. If you have trusted in Christ, you now enter this new reality by faith in Christ. If you join with millions of others who place their hope that God will accept you on behalf of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection for your sins, you can have the hope of a new beginning too.

Jesus has a way of making what seems to be the end just the beginning. This dynamic has shown itself true in my life. When I got to the end of myself and trusted in Jesus alone to pay for my sins, I found a beginning. This new beginning for me colors everything about who I am today. Simply put, I am a follower of Christ. This does not mean I am perfect (like Christ was/is), but it says I would like to be. When I fall short of this ideal, the grace of God views my imperfections through the obedience of Jesus. It is at those times that I, again, find what should be an end, due to the resurrection of Jesus, is only just another beginning.

PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

In what ways has Jesus turned events around in your life that should seem like the end but are really just the beginning?

