

REFLECTIONS ON PASSION WEEK

Passion Week is the week in between Palm Sunday – Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem – and Easter Sunday – the day of Jesus’ resurrection. It is the week that leads up to the culmination of Jesus’ earthly ministry. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a week so crucial to humanity; history was divided, death was conquered, and heaven was revealed. No person in history has ever impacted the world the way Jesus has. No one has ever impacted your life, or mine, the way Jesus has. 2000 years ago something amazing and unbelievable happened – your Creator died for you and your sins, he was not merely a man on the cross but he was your God! Is there anything more He could have done to demonstrate His love for you? On that old rugged cross, Jesus laid down His life to give you life. The creator of the universe has become our friend. It is THE most significant event in our lives, but isn’t it a shame that we often forget? We forget the Lord and stray from Him. We wander from his loving embrace as if there was something else we would rather have. Today as you read this, where are you? Have you forgotten? Are you astray? The heavenly Father beckons you to remember Him. He is the lover of your soul. No one loves you like He does.

We will be going through a set of Quiet Times that focuses on an event that occurred on that particular day of Passion Week. As we spend this week focused on Jesus’ life and death, let’s ask God to make this story come alive in our hearts. Until we meet again on Good Friday let us draw near to Him by walking through this Passion Week with Him. Try to abstain from some of your normal activities such as going out or watching television. Use that time to seek Him and to walk through this week with Him. Try fasting a day or two in order to identify with and better understand the suffering Jesus went through. Just like the song says, “Once again I look upon the cross where you died. Once again I’m humbled and I’m broken inside...” May God open your heart so that in the end – as we journey through this Passion Week together – we may sing with all of our hearts, “Once again I thank you. Once again I pour out my life”. May our lives be touched and changed as you walk with Jesus through His passion. He is a GOOD and AWESOME God!

A Word Before...

It's early in the final week. The props and players for Friday's drama are in position. Six-inch spikes are in the bin. A crossbeam leans against a shed wall. Thorn limbs are wrapped around a trellis awaiting the weaving of a soldier's fingers.

The players are nearing the stage. Pilate is concerned at the number of Passover pilgrims. Annas and Caiaphas are restless over a volatile Nazarene. Judas views his master with furtive eyes. A centurion is available, awaiting the next crucifixions.

Players and props. Only this is no play; it's a divine plan. A plan begun before Adam felt heaven's breath and now all heaven waits and watches. All eyes are on one figure – The Nazarene.

Commonly clad. Uncommonly focused. Leaving Jericho and walking toward Jerusalem. He doesn't chatter. He doesn't pause. He is on a journey. His final journey.

Even the angels are silent. They know this is no ordinary walk. They know this is no ordinary week. For hinged on this week is the door of eternity.

Let's walk with him.

Let's see how Jesus spent his final days.

Let's see what mattered to God.

When a man knows the end is near – only the important surfaces. Impending death distills the vital. The trivial is bypassed. The unnecessary is overlooked. That which is vital remains. So, if you would know Christ, ponder his final days.

He knew the end was near. He knew the finality of Friday. He read the last chapter before it was written and heard the final chorus before it was sung. As a result, the critical was centrifuged from the casual. Distilled truths taught. Deliberate deeds done. Each step calculated. Every act premeditated.

Knowing he had just one week with the disciples, what did Jesus tell them? Knowing it would be his last time in the temple, how did he act? Conscious that the last sand was slipping through the hourglass, what mattered?

Enter the holy week and observe.

Feel his passion. Laughing as children sing. Weeping as Jerusalem ignores. Scorning as priests accuse. Pleading as disciples sleep. Feeling sad as Pilate turns.

Sense his power. Blind eyes...seeing. Fruitless tree...withering. Moneychangers...scampering. Religious leaders...cowering. Tomb...opening.

Hear his promise. Death has no power. Failure holds no prisoners. Fear has no control. For God has come, God has come into your world...to take you home.

Let's follow Jesus on his final journey. For by observing his, we may learn how to make ours.

-Taken from "And The Angels Were Silent" by Max Lucado

Monday

“Fruitful Love”

Begin with Prayer asking God to open your heart

Read the Passage: **Mark 11:12-19**

Observations...

This incident with the fig tree illustrates what is happening in the Temple...

1. What did Jesus want when he approached the fig tree?
2. How did the fig tree look from far away?
3. But when Jesus came closer what did He discover?

Now look at what happens at the Temple...

4. What does God want from those who worship Him?
5. Why does Jesus clear out the temple (v. 15 – 19)? In what ways were the ‘worshippers’ at the temple similar to the withered fig tree?

Reflection...

Apostle Paul says, “we are the Temple of God”. When you look at your own hearts what do you see – a Temple full of prayer and worship or a Temple full of religious duties and obligations? Would you characterize your Christian life as more of a religion or a relationship? Do you do things because you are overwhelmed with a love for God or because you feel a sense of responsibility and duty? In 1 Samuel 16:7 God says ‘The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’ Spend some time reflecting on the state of your heart, asking God to make it pure and clean.

Prayer...

Dear Jesus, forgive me because a lot of times I give you just the form of religion, but when you look closer you don't see much “fruit”. Help me to not just put on a show, but instead, to give you a heart of worship and prayer. Help me to regain my first love. Come into my heart and throw away everything that distracts me from worshipping you sincerely. Make this Temple one that is a house of prayer. May I learn to always be motivated to love you in everything I do because you first loved me.

Tuesday “Lavishing Love”

Begin with Prayer asking God to open your heart

Read the Passage: **Mark 14:3-9**

Observations...

“Anointing was a common custom at feasts. The woman’s action expressed her deep devotion to Jesus.” (NIV study note) The perfume was worth at least a year’s wages. Imagine the value by today’s standards.

1. What are some things that Mark points out about the woman’s display of “deep devotion to Jesus”?
2. What can we see about her heart and her love for Jesus? (v.3-5)
3. How is the attitude of this woman so different from the others in the room? (John in his account identifies Judas as the criticizer, right before he agrees to betray Jesus.)
4. What are some things that we can learn about worship and about devotion for Jesus? What could the alabaster jar represent in your life?

Reflection...

This woman demonstrated her love for Jesus in a way that seemed like a waste to others. Is there ever a waste when we lavish Jesus with our love? Never. Love is often illogical. This woman may have broken a jar for Jesus, but soon Jesus will break his own body for her. He spilled so much more than a jar of perfume in His love for us. He lavished us with love through blood on the cross. May we learn to love Jesus illogically.

Prayer...

Dear Jesus, I want my heart to be like this woman’s. I want to give you devotion and love that doesn’t care about what I have to give up or sacrifice. I want to love you with everything that’s inside of me. I can’t muster it up, but I pray that you will put the spark of thankfulness for the cross in my heart so that it can become a fire of “deep devotion for Jesus”.

Wednesday
“The Tale of the Crucified Crook”

Begin with Prayer asking God to open your heart

Read Luke 23:38 – 43 before reading the story

The only thing more outlandish than the request was that it was granted. Just trying to picture the scene is enough to short-circuit the most fanciful of imagination; a flatnosed ex-con asking God's son for eternal life? But trying to imagine the appeal being honored, well, that steps beyond the realm of reality and enters absurdity.

But as absurd as it may appear, that's exactly what happened. He who deserved hell got heaven and we are left with a puzzling riddle. What, for goodness' sake, was Jesus trying to teach us? What was he trying to prove by pardoning this strong-arm, who in all probability had never said grace, much less done anything to deserve it?

If anyone was ever worthless, this one was. If any man ever deserved dying, this man probably did. If any fellow was ever a loser, this fellow was at the top of the list.

Perhaps that is why Jesus chose him to show us what he thinks of the human race. Maybe this criminal had heard the Messiah speak. Maybe he had seen him love the lowly. Maybe he had watched him dine with the punks, pickpockets, and potmouths on the streets. Or maybe not. Maybe the only thing he knew about this Messiah was what he now saw: a beaten, slashed, nail-suspended preacher. His face crimson with blood, his bones peeking through torn flesh, his lungs gasping for air., though, told him he had never been in better company. And somehow he realized that even though all he had was prayer, he had finally met the One to whom he should pray.

"Any chance that you could put in a good word for me?" (Loose translation.)
"Consider it done."

Now why did Jesus do that? What in the world did he have to gain by promising this desperado a place of honor at the banquet table? What in the world could this chiseling quisling ever offer in return? I mean, the Samaritan woman I can understand. She could go back and tell the tale. And Zacchaeus had some money that he could give. But this guy? What is he going to do? Nothing!

That's the point. Listen closely. Jesus' love does not depend upon what we do for him. Not at all. In the eyes of the King, you have value simply because you are. You don't have to look nice or perform well. Your value is inborn.

Period.

Think about that for just a minute. You are valuable just because you exist. Not because of what you do or what you have done, but simply because you are. Remember that. The next time someone tries to pass you off as a cheap buy, just think about the way Jesus honors you. And smile.

I do. I smile because I know I don't deserve love like that. None of us do. When you get right down to it, any contribution that any of us make is pretty puny. All of us-even the purest of us-deserve heaven about as much as that crook did. All of us are signing on Jesus' credit card, not ours.

And it also makes me smile to think that there is a grinning ex-con walking the golden streets who knows more about grace than a thousand theologians. No one else would have given him a prayer. But in the end that is all that he had. And in the end, that is all it took.
No wonder they call Him the Savior.

- Max Lucado 'No wonder they call Him the Savior'

WALKING WITH JESUS IN HIS PASSION

Reflection...

Romans 5:7 says 'Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' Spend some time reflecting and remembering what Jesus has done on your behalf.

1. What are the points that this author is trying to make?

2. What are your reactions?

3. What kind of God do we see from this story?

Prayer...

Dear Jesus, what can I say but thank you. Thank You So Much for this undeserved love! Keep on reminding me of what you did for me so that I never forget your awesome sacrifice of love.

Thursday
“Fully God; But Fully Human”

Begin with Prayer asking God to open your heart

Read the Passage: **Mark 14:12 - 42**

Observations...

Think of one time in your life where you were stressed beyond belief, when you were so overwhelmed in pain / agony that you felt like you couldn't go on.

Now multiply that by a million times and you will only BEGIN to understand the pain and anguish in Jesus' heart.

1. Why is Jesus going through so much pain? What is his struggle?
2. It's important to note how Jesus spend his final days before the Cross. What does He do? How does he treat his closest disciples?

Reflection...

John 15:13 'Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' We often don't realize that Jesus was God but at the same time he was totally human. Even though this is a hard concept to understand, what does it reveal to us about God and his love for us? See how He lived and yet despite this pain, spent His last days serving His people. Spend some time thanking God and asking to be filled with this same love for others.

Prayer...

Dear Jesus, you were fully human when you came to this Earth. You knew the amount of pain that you had to suffer because of my sins and you cried out for help on Mt. Gethsemane. But you still went ahead and died for me, not reluctantly but you endured with joy (Hebrews 12:2). Thank You for being the Savior King that showed this amazing love for me.

WALKING WITH JESUS IN HIS PASSION

Friday
“The Crucifixion”

Begin with Prayer asking God to open your heart

Read the Passage: **Mark 15:16-41**

Reflection...

This time there are no questions and no analysis. Just read it again or read the account in the other three books and let it soak in a little. THIS is what Jesus did for you and me. How amazing is God's love for us...

Journal your thoughts (One suggestion is to write out your testimony of how you first met Jesus and what He has meant in your life. Also, write out some prayers of thanksgiving, worship, and dedication to Him.)

Prayer...

Dear Jesus, it's hard for me to understand what all this really means. Open my heart so that it can become more than a story or a fable. Who would go through all that for me? I don't get it. I guess that's why they call it AMAZING grace. Thank you, God, because I know that I didn't earn or deserve any of this at all.