



Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecies

Daily Devotionals for Holy Week 2019

“Jesus set His face like flint toward Jerusalem”

Isaiah 50:7; Lk 9:51



First Presbyterian Church, Starkville, Mississippi, EPC

This little booklet is dedicated to the members of FPC Starkville with the prayer that it will be edifying for each one and draw them closer to Jesus during the time of Holy Week. I'm thankful for my wife Barbara's keen eye for detail in proof reading and her editorial comments on the first drafts. I also want to thank Rita Usher for her time and expertise in publishing the booklet, her prayers of support and for suggestions and encouragement she offered during the planning stages.

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Introduction

The Old Testament points to the Messiah with many prophecies, shadows, parallels and types. Actually, the entire Old Testament is about God's covenant promise of redemption through the coming Messiah. This booklet is based on several prophecies (but not all) which were fulfilled around the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. The timing of events presented here does not necessarily align with the historical chronology; i.e. the upper room scene is presented here on Tuesday rather than Thursday, and the crucifixion which was actually completed on Friday, here we begin with Friday's lesson and finish with Saturday's. Scripture is mostly from NKJV.

Jesus said that his "time" was at hand for the Son of Man to go up to Jerusalem, be killed and rise again on the third day (Matt 20:17-19; 26:1-2). "His time" - God's time is always perfect, as we will see. When He said this to His disciples, they argued that He should not go into Jerusalem (Matt 16:21-23). He had predicted his death and resurrection several times prior to His Jerusalem entry, but they did not understand. W.T. Conner in *Christian Doctrine* writes: "Jesus deliberately moved toward the cross as the place where His mission of redemption would be brought to consummation." As we work our way through these events, we will see clearly that Jesus is in control every step of the way. He knew full well what was in store for Him.

Jeremiah's lament for Israel was probably on His mind as He faced the upcoming ordeal: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger." (Lamentations 1:12) ESV

Palm Sunday, April 14 – The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

“Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” Zech 9:9-11 (v 9b)

Psalm 118:25-26; Matt 21:1-11; Jn 12:12-15

At the time of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, Jews from every corner of the known world were there for the celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After saying many times that His time has not yet come, He finally said that His hour (time) had come. God’s timing is always perfect, and in this we see an extraordinary example. Jack B. Scott writes: “Zech 9:9-11 tells both of the sure end of Jerusalem’s enemies and the coming of her King. The Lord will do this by the King who is to come. ... The Christ is described in terms both of His glory and His humility.” (Matt 21:5). There were about 2 million pilgrims in Jerusalem, a vast, excited crowd with high religious expectations. So this was no coincidence; Jesus’ actions were deliberate. Some had heard of the resurrection of Lazarus and had journeyed to Bethany to see this product of one of Jesus’ latest miracles. Many of them would be part of the entourage accompanying Jesus as He entered the city.

Rather than walking, as Jesus almost always traveled, He chose to ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey colt. The owners of the donkey had gladly loaned it and its mother to the disciples for Jesus’ use. They brought the donkey to Him and laid their garments on it for Jesus to ride. The road from Bethany came down the western side of the Mount of Olives into and through the Kidron Valley. When Jesus viewed Jerusalem before Him, His heart became heavy and He wept over the city (Luke 19:41); He knew that very soon the city and the Temple would be totally destroyed (Lk 19:43-44; it would be in AD 70, almost 40 years later). As He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, the crowd, waving palms and putting branches before Him on the road shouted “Hosanna!” (Hebrew for “O Save Now!” or, “Save Us!”), “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!” (Ps 118:25,26; John 12:13).

John Calvin comments: “We must first understand what is meant by this phrase, *to come in the name of the Lord*. He who does not rashly put himself forward, or falsely assume the honor, but, being duly called, has the direction and authority of God for his actions, *cometh in the name of God*. This title belongs to all the true servants of God.” As a definite Messianic claim, Jesus was offering Himself to the people not what they expected: a strong warrior riding a chariot or a stallion war-horse to lead a rebellion against Rome, but in fulfillment of prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which pictures a king coming to Jerusalem, “righteous and having salvation ... humble and riding on a donkey, a colt of a donkey”.

For an adult to ride a donkey in those days, he had to bend his knees to keep his feet from dragging the ground. What a silly sight for a king! Some who had come out of Jerusalem to meet Him asked: “Who is this?” (Matt 21:10). Some of the pilgrims who probably had accompanied

Him from Bethany answered, “He is Jesus of Nazareth”. (These pilgrims from foreign lands showed more support for the Messiah than did the inhabitants of Jerusalem.)

Can you imagine? A king, THE KING through Whom all things were created, entering the Holy City riding on the back of a lowly donkey? The meaning of Zech 9:9-11 comes clear: while Jesus is coming in peace and love, His act of humility isn’t one of weakness. Rather, it shows His strength. William Barclay tells us that His actions show His courage, His claim and His appeal. First, He knew that the Jewish authorities hated Him and wanted to kill Him. Rather than sneak into the city, He comes in such a manner that every eye is on Him. Second, by arriving on the colt of a donkey, He ultimately fulfills the messianic prophecy of Zech 9:9-11. And third, by coming on a donkey in peace rather than on a war-horse, the crowd excitedly accepts Him. (*The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 2* paraphrased)

Jesus boldly “set His face like flint toward Jerusalem” (Isaiah 50:7), riding on a donkey colt with determination to fulfill His Father’s plan of salvation. This little donkey brought the King of kings into Jerusalem! Did they receive Him as King? Could those who were shouting “Hosanna” this day be the same ones a few days later shouting, “Crucify Him, Crucify Him!”?

For Reflection: What was Jesus’ mission? How do we respond? Do we receive Jesus as our Messiah, LORD and King?

Prayer: Heavenly God, You are great and greatly to be praised, for You are the Creator of all things and the provider of salvation for Your people. We lift up our hearts, minds, hands and eyes to you with thanksgiving, for the gift of Your Son, Who entered Jerusalem in humility, riding on a donkey, to fulfill Your covenant promise of the coming of the Messiah. Thank You, LORD Jesus for giving Yourself as a ransom to save us from our sins. In Your Name we pray, amen.

Monday, April 15 – Cleansing the Temple

He will purify the Sons of Levi (Malachi 3:1-3; Matt 21:12-13),

Rejected by his own (Ps 69:7-8; Jn 1:11),

Accepted by the gentiles (Hosea 2:23; Acts 28:28)

The Herodian Temple was by far the largest structure of the three historic Temples. It was composed of several successive areas with controlled access within the overall Temple Precinct. The outermost courtyard with general public access was the Court of the Gentiles. As we progress inward, next is the Court of the Women, then the Court of the Israelites (men), the Court of the Priests, the Temple Court and the Temple Building itself with the Holy of Holies (which only the High Priest entered once a year). When Jesus entered the Temple, He was enraged by the scene exhibited in the Courtyard of the Gentiles. He had cleared it of corruption three years before, but It had again turned into a “den of thieves” (or vipers). Annas, one of the prior High Priests was the ringleader of the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals. William Barclay writes: “The stalls where [animals] were sold were called the Bazaars of Annas and were the private property of the family of the high priest by that name.” (*The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 2*)

With so many pilgrims crowding into the Temple outer courtyard, there was foremost opportunity for corruption. The money changers were charging an exorbitant exchange fee, sacrificial animals were overpriced and Annas got his portion of it. Most pilgrims paid their annual Temple tax at this time and were required to use accepted coinage. Greek and Roman coins were not accepted, especially Roman coins with Caesar’s likeness. Since most pilgrims, coming from abroad, didn’t have acceptable coins, they were scammed by the money changers. In righteous anger, Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers and drove them and the animal sellers out of the Courtyard, (Matt 21:12-13) as alluded to in Malachi 3:1-3: “He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi.” Psalm 69:9 also indicates: “Zeal for your house will consume me”, pointing toward Jesus’ response to the corruption of the Temple. Matthew Henry comments: “If Christ came now into many parts of his visible church, how many secret evils he would discover and cleanse! And how many things daily practiced under the cloak of religion, would he show to be more suitable to a den of thieves than to a house of prayer!” (*Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*)

Matt 21:14 tells us that after the cleansing, Jesus remained in the Temple area, healing the blind and lame. He also engaged in teaching those who would listen (Luke 19:47). Jesus didn’t clear everyone out. Those who needed Him stayed; only the ones with guilty consciences fled. “Need is never sent away empty by Jesus Christ. Jesus’ anger was never merely negative; it never stopped with the attack on that which was wrong; it always went on to the positive helping of those who were in need. In the truly great man or woman, anger and love go hand in hand. There is anger at those who exploit the simple and bar the seeker; but there is love for those

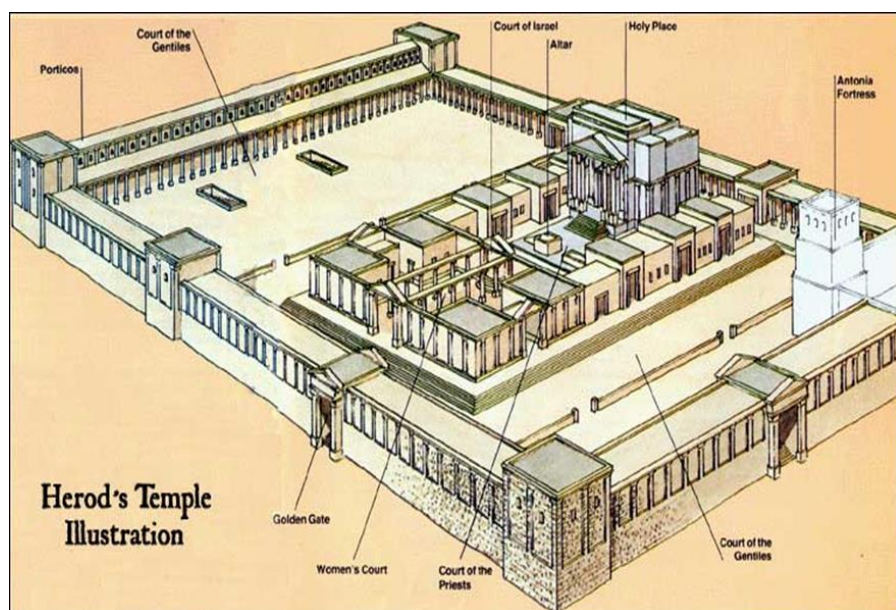
whose need is great. The destructive force of anger must always go hand in hand with the healing power of love.” (Wm. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 2*)

Luke also tells us (20:1,2) that when Jesus began teaching those who remained in the Temple He was questioned by the Chief Priests and Scribes about His authority to heal and teach. They would not answer His question about the baptism of John the Baptist, so, He refused to answer them. At this point, the religious leaders rejected Jesus as they felt threatened (Ps 69:7-8). John 1:11 tells us that “He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.” Matthew Henry puts it quite bluntly: “He came to save a lost world, because it was a world of his own making. Yet the world knew him not. When he comes as a Judge, the world shall know him. Many say that they are Christ's own, yet do not receive him, because they will not part with their sins, nor have him to reign over them.”

During Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple, the scheme of Annas was exposed which caused him even more hatred of Jesus and he and the religious leaders, including Annas’ son-in-law Caiaphas, the High Priest at that time, stepped up their plot to kill him (Matt 26:3-5). So, after Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was over, they planned quietly, without raising a protest from the huge crowd of pilgrims, to do their dirty work.

For Reflection: Could corruption and thievery sneak into our present-day churches? If we detected something wrong in the church and did retaliate with anger, would it be accompanied with love? Are we Christ’s own, right now?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide us to keep your Father’s house a reverent, house of God. Make us bold in correcting error and wrongdoing, and give us wisdom and judgement to act in forgiveness and love for anyone whom we might confront.
In Your Name, LORD Jesus, Amen.



Tuesday, April 16 – Passover Meal, Last Supper

Betrayed by a friend (Ps 41:9; Matt 26:20-21)

In the Upper Room, humble servant (Is 49:5-6), foot washing, (John 13:3-5)

Instituted the Lord's Supper (Gen 14:18)/(Matt 26:26-27)

When Jesus sent His disciples to find a place for the Passover supper, He told them to look for a man carrying a water jug who will guide them to a room for the Passover meal. (Mark 14:13). That would be quite noticeable, as that was a woman's job in those days. Then, while preparing for the meal, Jesus told them He will be gone from them a little while, but will see them again, and they didn't understand His words. He also told them He will be betrayed (Matt 26:20-21) as prophesied in Ps 41:9: "Even My own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate My bread, has lifted up his heel against Me." The thought of betrayal disturbed the disciples (Matt 26:22) and they began to ask, "Is it I, Lord?" Judas, however, asked "Is it I, Rabbi?" (v. 25) Notice the difference, Lord vs. Rabbi. Judas, who has never been recognized as referring to Jesus as Lord, referred to Him as teacher, demonstrating his lack of belief that Jesus is of God. Then, Peter declared that he would never deny Jesus (v. 33) which raised a stern rebuke from Jesus: "...before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." (v. 34). And He said to Judas, "What you do, do quickly." (Jn 13:27b)

Actually, Judas had already gone to the Chief Priests and received the offer to deliver Jesus to them for thirty pieces of silver. (Matt 26:14-16) & (Zech 11:12,13). His act of betrayal will culminate with Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Why did Judas betray Jesus? Whether it was greed or lust for power, we don't know, but Luke tells us that Satan himself had "entered into Judas" (Luke 22:3). The prophetic reference is found in the thirty pieces of silver given to Zechariah after his work as a shepherd. He went to those he worked for and asked them to pay him what they thought he was worth. They gave him thirty pieces of silver, which he sarcastically called a "handsome price" because it was such a small amount—the price paid for a servant's accidental death (Exodus 21:32). The employers meant to insult Zechariah with this amount of money. Returning the insult, God told Zechariah to "throw it to the potter," and Zechariah tossed the money into the house of the Lord to be given to the potter. What a paltry sum for the life of Jesus! In New Testament times that would be a little less than a month's wages for unskilled labor. Judges 16:5 tells us that each of the lords of the Philistines offered Delilah 1100 pieces of silver to entice Samson and find out the source of his strength. Joshua 13:3 tells us: "...there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron." That being the case, she received 5500 pieces of silver for Samson's shave!

John 13:4 tells us that during the meal: "He (Jesus) rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet". Wow! He stripped to the attire of a servant and washed the grime of Jerusalem from His disciples' feet. This action in the society at that time was reserved only for the lowest of servants and shows the spirit of humility suggested by Paul in Phil 2:6-8.

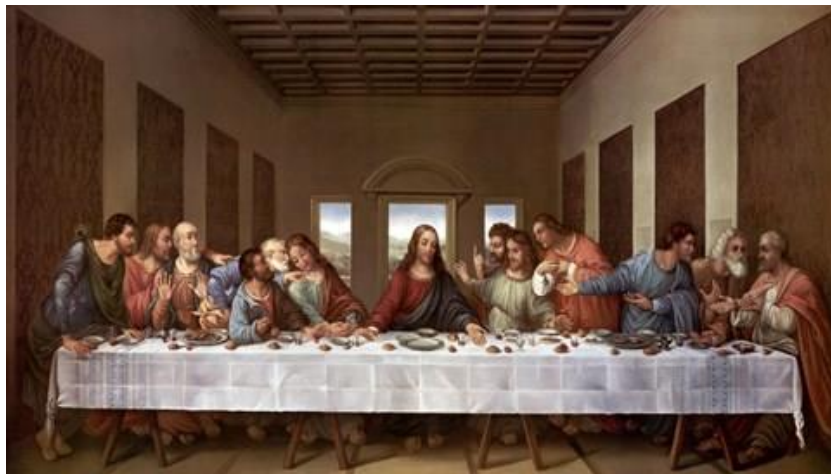
Matthew Henry comments: “Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, that he might teach us to think nothing (is) below us, wherein we may promote God’s glory, and the good of our brethren. We must address ourselves to duty, and must lay aside every thing that would hinder us in what we have to do. Christ washed his disciples’ feet, that he might signify to them the value of spiritual washing, and the cleansing of the soul from the pollutions of sin.” (Matthew Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Bible*)

In our society today, Christians can be subjected to much criticism, ridicule and mistreatment when they refuse to join with those who indulge in acts which are contrary to Christian principles or when they disagree with some secular opinions or “alternate” life styles. When we know that we are right, rather than bristle and argue vehemently we ought to respond with humility. If we discover that we are wrong, we must humbly repent. This kind of humility is only possible when we follow the example of Christ. The God-man came, becoming a servant (signified by His washing the feet of the disciples); facing persecution, beatings, and mockery which lay ahead, which He humbly received (Isa. 53:3, 6). He knew the Father’s will was that He should die for us (John 4:34; 2 Cor 5:21).

At the end of the supper, Jesus took the bread and wine in a similar manner as Melchizedek, king of Salem did (Gen 14:18-20) when he blessed Abram: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High...”. Jesus continued with His disciples to establish the sacrament of “The Lord’s Supper” or “Communion”. “And when they had sung a hymn, they departed to the Mount of Olives.” (Matt 26:30) They probably sang *The Great Hallel*, (Ps 136). *Hallel* means *Praise God!*

For reflection: Do we respond with humility to criticism or mistreatment for our beliefs? How can we combine self-confidence with humility? How do we make changes when we are wrong and receive just criticism? Are we serving God by serving others?

Prayer: Father God, guide us in our relationships with others to treat them with respect and humility, and to serve You by serving others. Help us to recognize when we need to make changes in our own lives, in order to grow in our sanctification and bring glory to You and to our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ. In His Name, Amen.



Wednesday, April 17 – Mount of Olives - Agony in The Garden of Gethsemane followed by His arrest

“A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3c)

“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.” (Matt 26:38)

After supper Jesus led his disciples eastward across the Kidron Valley to The Mount of Olives and into the Garden of Gethsemane (Greek for “olive press”). (Matt 26:36-41) A full moon lit the way into the peacefulness of the garden. In Gethsemane, Jesus, however, was in great agony due to the cross which loomed before him. Mark describes it as “greatly distraught” (Mk 14:33). Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus a little way into the Garden. Jesus instructed them to “...watch with Me” and He went on a little farther, fell on His knees and prayed. Whether drowsy from the meal or in sympathy with Jesus’ agony, as Luke argues, (Lk 22:45) Peter, James and John fell asleep. When Jesus returned from praying, He said to Peter: “Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” (Matt 26:40-41). Remember, Peter had said he would never deny Jesus, but here he could not even stay awake. James and John had asked Jesus earlier to let them sit one on His right and one on His left when He came into His kingdom. (Mark 10:35-37). And Jesus answered them “...are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” (v. 38b). They answered that they were able. But they too couldn’t stay awake and keep watch. Jesus didn’t tell them to pray for Him; He told them to pray for themselves. Three times Jesus returned from prayer and found them asleep.

Luke tells us in Lk 22:43 that “An angel came to Him from heaven and strengthened Him. And being in agony, He prayed most earnestly.” Nicholas Reid in “Knowing God in All Our Ways” comments: “Christ in complete obedience of the law of God, demonstrates most poignantly what it means to trust and acknowledge God in all things. With sweat like drops of blood, Christ, in full recognition of the weight of the cross and the consuming wrath of God, humbly prays: ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done’.” (Lk 22:42ff) (in *Table Talk* Feb 2019). Yes, the angel strengthened Him, but the “cup” was not taken from Him. (Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah Vol. One*, paraphrased). “Willing” has the connotation of being settled in eternity past when the Trinity agreed on the “plan of salvation” which has been called “The Covenant of Redemption”, or “The Covenant of Grace”. In His second prayer Jesus prayed: “...if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” (Lk 22:42b). So, we are assured that Jesus was determined to fulfill His duties as the “Lamb of God”.

Jesus prayed the third time “...saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said ... Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.” (Matt 26:44-46) It is likely that these were the last words He said to His disciples before His death.

Judas, knowing where Jesus and the disciples would be (Jn 18:2), brought Jewish leaders with a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards, with lanterns, torches and weapons to arrest Him. He identified Jesus with a kiss on His cheek, showing the close relationship that they would have had. This, being at night outside of Jerusalem would avoid the crowd of pilgrims who in broad daylight might have rioted over Jesus' arrest. So, Jesus remained in control, ensuring His mission would not be thwarted.

John tells us in Jn 18:2-6 that Jesus, knowing what was coming, went forward and asked, "Whom do you seek?" they said, "Jesus of Nazareth". And He said, "I am He" and they fell back to the ground, reeling from Jesus' words "I Am". He asked them again and they again replied, "Jesus of Nazareth". He said "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way, that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.'" (vv. 8,9) Jesus, not concerned for Himself but for the safety of His disciples, willingly faced arrest.

Peter took out his sword (or dagger) and cut off the right ear of the High Priest's servant, named Malchus. (v. 10) Jesus rebuked Peter and told him to put his sword back into its sheath And He healed Malchus. Jesus then said, "Allow this", that He must "drink the cup which My Father has given Me" (v. 11) According to Matt 26:53 He could have prayed to the Father: "to provide Me with more than 12 legions of angels." That's about 72,000 angels!

They bound Him and took Him without a struggle in the middle of the night first to Annas then to the home of Caiaphas, the current High Priest, where the scribes and elders were assembled. And all the disciples forsook Him and fled. (Matt 26:56b) Zech 13:7 prophesied "Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered".

For Reflection: Have we promised to be faithful to Jesus but for some reason failed to honor and obey Him? When we are distressed about something, how do we respond? With prayer? How does the fact that Jesus was determined to "drink the cup" move or affect us? Would we ever forsake Jesus? Do we acknowledge God in all things?

Prayer: Father in Heaven, strengthen us and comfort us when times of dread or distress press down upon us. Enable us to see that You are sovereignly guiding us so that Your will is done. Thank You, Dear Jesus for the salvation You provide for us by drinking of the cup of wrath for sin that would be ours. In Your Name, we pray, LORD Jesus, Amen.



The Garden of Gethsemane

Thursday, April 18 – Kangaroo Court

Forsaken & abandoned by friends (Ps 38:11); (Matt 26:56),

Denied 3 times by Peter (Lk 22:60), False witnesses testify against Him (Ps 26:12); (Matt 26:60), silent before His accusers (Isa 53:7); (Matt 27:12-14)

It was nighttime and cold in the courtyard of the High Priest. Servants and others who had gathered there after Jesus' arrest "...kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard." (Lk 22:55) John had come to the courtyard and Peter also had followed the crowd and sat with them to warm himself. It was here that Peter denied three times any association with Jesus; and the rooster crowed. (Lk 22:60)

While Jesus was being interrogated, Judas, who had handed Him over to the authorities, was full of remorse, but not true repentance. (Matt 27:3,5) He threw the thirty pieces of silver into the Temple, as prophesied in Zechariah 11:13 and committed suicide. Satan had entered into him with hopes of destroying Jesus and His ministry. However, God in His sovereignty, allowed Satan to possess Judas and use him to betray Jesus in order to bring about our redemption.

There is a difference between the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter. Yes, both crimes were evil; both disciples fell away from Jesus (although Peter had said that he would never fall away). Jesus had told Judas to "do it quickly" but He said to Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." (Lk 22:32) Judas did not return to the LORD, but Peter did and was restored. He endured, repented and was forgiven. (from R.C. Sproul, *Can I Lose My Salvation?*) It was Jesus' intercession that provided the strength of Peter's faith and repentance. And God sovereignly used Judas' fall for good, to accomplish our salvation: "God works all things according to the council of his will" (Eph 1:11)

A mock trial had already been set up with Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas in the middle of the night. In every appearance the verdict was already ordered; earlier they had sought to destroy Him. (Lk 19:47) It was against Rabbinic law for the Jews to conduct a trial the day of and the day before Passover; or at nighttime. Essentially everything about the trial was illegal. (from Brown, Raymond E.) Caiaphas sat as judge, and his father-in-law, Annas, previously the High Priest and still very much in control of the Sanhedrin was also present. In fact, Caiaphas was nothing but a puppet of Annas. It was truly a kangaroo court; observe the proceedings: Caiaphas illegally interrogated Jesus as he acted as both prosecutor and judge. Psalm 26:12 predicts: "False witnesses have risen against Me, and such as breathe out violence." Many false witnesses were brought in whose testimonies were inconsistent with each other until finally two witnesses falsely reported that "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days'" (Matt 26:60-61) It had taken 46 years to complete it. At one point in His ministry He did predict the destruction of the Temple which would happen in AD 70. (Matt 24:2) John tells us that when He cleansed the Temple the first time, the Jews asked Him what authority He had. He answered, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". (Jn 2:19) In verse 21 John tells us that the two witnesses misstated what they had heard because

they didn't realize "He was speaking of the temple of His body." John was very kind in saying it this way. No witnesses came forth (were allowed?) for His defense.

Jesus was silent before His accusers, "He was led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." (Isa 53:7b) His captors mocked Him, blindfolded and beat Him, spit in His face and did other hateful things but He remained silent. So, Caiaphas charged Him with an oath: "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" and forced Him to answer. Jesus said: "It is as you said." (Matt 26:63). How did Caiaphas know Jesus would answer like that, with the truth? Luke reminds us that Jesus also said, "Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God." (Lk 22:69) At that, Caiaphas tore his clothes in disgust, which was forbidden of a priest. He then instructed the Sanhedrin to be witnesses to Jesus' statement, and to find Him guilty of blasphemy, although jurors could not be witnesses. They immediately issued the death penalty which was also illegal, as the law required a two-day period before a ruling of capital charges. They turned Him over to Pilate to be crucified saying "...it is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." (Jn 18:31) The charge against Him was changed to sedition, a secular crime which came under the authority of Rome.

Pilate questioned Him, could find no wrongdoing and sent Him to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem for Passover. Herod could find no wrongdoing and sent Him back to Pilate. (Lk 23:6-9) Pilate asked Him, "Are You a king?" "Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.' Pilate said to Him 'What is truth?'" (Jn 18:37-38) Then Pilate acknowledged that he could find no fault in Jesus at all worthy of death. So, he took Him and scourged Him thinking that would satisfy the Jewish leaders. But when he suggested releasing Jesus, the Jews shouted, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" (v. 40) So they requested the release of Barabbas, a murderer and insurrectionist. Interestingly, his name was Hebrew for "son of the father". They wanted to trade the real Son of the Father for a criminal. What is truth? Earlier, Jesus had said, "I am the way, the truth and the light. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (Jn 14:6)

For reflection: Have we ever denied Christ? Do we speak out on His behalf when we hear others disparaging Him? Does Jesus intercede for us today? How? How do we respond to the truth of John 14:6? How do faith and repentance interact with salvation?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may all praise and glory be to You, for You are the Creator of all things and the Author of salvation. Thank You for the grace and love that You shower upon us through the giving of Your Son, our Savior Who went through such torment and ill treatment at the hands of evil men and died for us. Guide us by the illumination of the Holy Spirit to be bold in our witness for Jesus in all that we do each day in our lives. In Jesus' precious Name, Amen

Friday, April 19 – Crucified

Jesus was mocked, humiliated and tortured (Isaiah 53), (Matt 27);
Offered wine mingled with gall to drink (Ps 69:21);(Matt 27:34)

Jesus was convicted of blasphemy for which the Jewish punishment was stoning. God's plan didn't fit with stoning. Pilate couldn't rule on religious cases, so the charge was changed to sedition. The crowd shouted, "Crucify him!" (Mk 15:13,14) and pledged their loyalty to Caesar: "We have no king but Caesar!" (Jn 19:15c) So, Pilate capitulated for political reasons and turned Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

The soldiers took sadistic pleasure in humiliating, torturing and ridiculing their victims prior to nailing them to the cross. It had become part of their due "punishment". In fact, the beatings and scourging were so severe, many victims died before reaching the cross. Before being crucified Jesus again was mocked (Ps 22:7-8);(Matt 27:41), spit on, slapped, paraded in a gaudy "robe" and a "crown" of thorns, had His beard pulled and plucked (Isa 50:6; Matt 27:26), and was scourged: He "gave His back to the smiters". (Isa 50:6a) "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief." He was "Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes, we are healed." (Isa 53:4b-5)

After that, carrying His own crosspiece, He was marched between four Roman soldiers to Golgotha. Pilate had written a placard to put over the crosspiece, reading "KING OF THE JEWS" in three languages. Meant to be sarcasm, this was surely the truth that Pilate had overlooked. He didn't see that Jesus' kingdom was not, and still is not of this world; it is everlasting, whereas the world will pass away. As Jesus had been treated so harshly, He weakened and couldn't continue to carry the crosspiece, so the soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry it (Matt 27:32). As they moved out toward Golgotha, there was an interesting incident recorded only by Luke concerning some onlookers who followed along. "...a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me but weep for yourselves and your children.'" (Lk 23:27,28) These were not the fickle crowd that had shouted "Hosanna!" just five days prior, but common people who had heard Jesus or heard about His teachings and miracles. They were truly shocked and saddened by the unjust verdict against Him. He went on to indicate the days ahead will be devastating to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, predicting the destruction of the city by the Romans in AD 70. Matthew Henry comments: "Though one would think he should be wholly taken up with his own concern, yet he found time and heart to take cognizance of their tears. Christ died lamented, and has a bottle for the tears of those that lamented him. He turned to them, though they were strangers to him, and bade them not weep for him, but for themselves. He diverts their lamentation into another channel." (*Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. 5*)

Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, was a hill probably located just outside the wall of Jerusalem on the northern edge of the city. Perhaps the name reflected the use of the hill as the spot of many crucifixions, or the shape of the hill, or other tradition, I don't know. The name we prefer, Calvary, has possibilities of traditional origin. Matthew Henry tells us: (Many) "of the ancients mention it (Golgotha) as a current tradition, that in this place our first father Adam was buried, and they think it highly congruous that there Christ should be crucified; 'for as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.'" However, he also mentions, "Something more credible is the tradition, that this mount Calvary was *that mountain in the land of Moriah* (and in the land of Moriah it certainly was, for so the country about Jerusalem was called), on which Isaac was to be offered; and the ram was offered instead of him; and then Abraham had an eye to *this day* of Christ, when he called the place *Jehovah-jireh—The Lord will provide*, expecting that so it would be seen in the mount of the Lord."

Just before He was nailed to the cross, "He was offered sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink." (Ps 69:21)/(Matt 27:34). Often sour wine mixed with myrrh was used as an anesthetic. Some commentators suggest that is what was offered. However, with gall, this could have been another form of mockery as that would make the wine undrinkable. Nevertheless, Jesus would not take the wine and went to the cross with full consciousness and sensitivity to pain. And they nailed Him to the cross. (Ps22:16);(Jn 20:25)

Mark 15:24-26 records: "And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. (Ps 22:18) Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS." The "third hour" refers to 9:00 am in our traditional time. He would remain on the cross about 6 hours, until 3:00 pm.

For reflection: Why did stoning not fit with God's plan? What is the difference between Jesus' kingdom and a worldly kingdom. How is Isaac a "type" of Christ? What is our understanding of "Jehovah-jireh" in our lives today?

Prayer: Gracious God, You are the maker and provider of all things. Without You, we would have nothing to sustain us. Thank You for Your love which has provided for our needs, our safety, our guidance and our salvation. In the Name of our Christ, Amen.

Saturday, April 20 – On the Cross

He was “...numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12); (Lk 23:32)

Jesus was made a curse by being hanged on a tree (Deut 21:23); (Gal 3:13)

Jesus was raised up on the cross along with two criminals being crucified, one on each side. (Isa 53:12; Lk 23:32) As the Suffering Servant, He continued to be mocked and reviled by the soldiers, bystanders and even the two criminals. The crowd shouted “If He is the Messiah, let Him come down from the cross! He saved others, Himself He cannot save!” (Matt 27:42) Actually He could have called the Father to send legions of angels to take Him down from the cross, but if He had come down from the cross, there would be no salvation for His people, for you, or for me.

In spite of being tortured and reviled, His first utterance from the cross was: “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Lk 23:33) He could have called the Father to consume those who were tormenting Him. No, He prayed for them, for forgiveness. God’s forgiveness comes from His mercy and grace through the atoning sacrifice of His Son which turns away His anger and wrath against sin. His mercy and justice, His love and wrath converge on the cross.

Most of His disciples remained at a distance from Him lest they should be found guilty as His associates, but some of the women came closer. When Jesus saw His mother standing there and the disciple whom He loved He said, “Woman, behold your son.” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother.” (Jn 19:26,27) And He put His mother into John’s charge. He could see her sorrow as she stood there in silence, alone, and He, not thinking about Himself, lovingly provided for her future.

In these verses we see how Jesus was made a curse in our place: Deut 21:23c, “A hanged man on a tree is cursed by God” and Gal 3:13b, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” As our sin bearer, He bore the sins of many (Isa 53:12). “And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (v 6) As the sacrificial lamb without blemish, He atoned for our sins and saved us from the wrath of God; And He makes intercession to God on our behalf. (Isa 53:11,12).

The torture and mistreatment by the soldiers was brutal. Death on the cross was the most painful death contrived by human minds. But all of this was nothing compared to the ultimate wrath of God that Jesus suffered in our place. For the first time in eternity, He was deserted, forsaken by God the Father. He uttered a cry no mortal can understand: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Ps 22:1)/(Matt 27:46) “...from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.” (v. 45) It was as if God had removed the Light of the world, allowing it to plunge into the total darkness of sin.

As He knew His mission was complete, in order to fulfill prophecy, He said, "I thirst". (Jn 19:28) He was offered/given sour wine as prophesied. (Ps22.15) Now that everything prophesied was fulfilled, He said: "It is finished." (Jn 19:30) The Greek word used is *tetelestai* which means it is accomplished, the race, the battle has been won! It is perfect. In his commentary on John, John Calvin reminds us "We must keep our faith fixed on Christ alone and not to allow it to turn aside in any other direction whatsoever. The *perfection* of salvation is contained only in Him... *It is finished.*" With His dying breath, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit".(Lk 23:46) A.W. Pink writes in *Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross*: "For a while, communication was broken – broken outwardly – as the light of God's holy countenance was hidden from the Sin-Bearer, but now the darkness had passed and was ended forever." After Darkness, Light!

The Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. His legs were not broken, as were the two criminals', but His side was pierced by one of the soldiers, confirming His death. He was removed from cross before sundown on preparation day and buried in a rich man's tomb (Isa 53:9) by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:57; Lk 23:50ff; Mk 15:45; Jn 19:38)

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He and Nicodemus, who brought spices for anointment, carried it to the tomb for burial. Joseph, apparently a Pharisee, had hewn out of rock what was to be his own grave in a nearby garden. No body had been laid in the tomb. It took courage for him to take the body, as anyone associated with Jesus was in danger of arrest. Don Fortner writes: "And he went boldly to Pilate and begged the body of his Lord, that he might give him a proper burial. When others were cowardly, Joseph was courageous. (By Jewish law) once a clean man touched a dead body he was unclean. That meant he could not keep the Passover. But that problem vanished in an instant. Joseph now understood that he did not need to keep the ceremonial Passover, because Christ, his Passover, had been sacrificed for him. The dead body he was handling was not his defilement, but his cleanness. The Lord Jesus had, by his shed blood, made atonement for his defilement (sin). The crucified Savior had made him clean; and he could not be made unclean again (Romans 4:8)."

A large stone was rolled over the entrance of the tomb and Roman soldiers were assigned to guard it.

For reflection: Was it really necessary for Jesus to die? What was/is the curse? How do we understand "forgiveness"? By what are we cleansed?

Prayer: Dearest Lord Jesus, we are overwhelmed when we realize the enormity of what You went through on the cross. May all honor, praise, glory and thanksgiving be unto You! For You have suffered not only the torture of humans but also, the very wrath of God in our place, in order to accomplish and ensure our salvation. In Your Name, LORD Jesus, Amen.

Sunday, April 21 - Easter Sunday – From the Resurrection to the Ascension
“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”
(Ps 16:10); “He is risen!” (Mk16:5)

The Sabbath was quiet as the disciples hid in fright, frustration and disappointment. Their Leader, their Teacher whom they believed was the promised Messiah was dead. Oh, how they had hoped some miracle would have taken Him down from the cross! Now, they were lost, afraid and desperate, true to the prediction: “Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter”. (Zech 13:7) The women had gathered spices and oils to use in the final burial rite, then rested on the Sabbath. Early, in the morning on the first day of the week “Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.” (Mk 16:2) They were wondering who might roll away the large stone which was sealing the tomb. Some writers have estimated the disc-like stone would have weighed about two tons. When they got there and “...looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away- for it was very large.” (v.4)

John tells us that Mary ran and told Peter and John who ran to the tomb. John got there first, looked in and saw the grave cloths, but he didn't go in. Peter, being Peter, barged right in. He found the tomb empty except for “the linen grave cloths lying there in order and the handkerchief that had been around His head... folded together in a place by itself.” (Jn 20:6,7) It was as if Jesus had withdrawn through and out of them. This brings up the point that Jesus could have withdrawn from the tomb without removing the stone from the entrance. But the empty tomb was prime evidence of the resurrection.

Mary went back to the tomb. She stood at the entrance weeping and looked down into it. “She saw two angels in white” who said, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She told them “They have taken away my Lord.” Then another figure came near her and repeated the question: “Why are you weeping?” She thought He was the gardener and said, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” (Jn 20:13-15) Then Jesus called: “Mary!” She knew immediately it was Jesus and exclaimed “Rabboni!” (My Teacher!) Jesus earlier had said, “I know My sheep and am known by My own.” (Jn 10:14b) She ran to tell Peter and the others that she had seen the LORD, “He is risen!”

Mark tells us that earlier the women, “... entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.” (Mk 16:5). He told them Jesus was not there, “He is risen! ...But go, tell His disciples.” (v. 6)

Some of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb went to the chief priests and told them what had happened. They had become like dead men (paralyzed) when an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb. The chief priests and elders got together and fabricated a story that when

the soldiers were asleep, Jesus' disciples came and stole the body. They then bribed the soldiers to tell it this way. (Matt 28:11-15)

Later that day Jesus appeared to two disciples who were returning home to Emmaus, about 7 miles from Jerusalem. They didn't recognize Him until they reached their destination and He broke bread with them. They immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell the others. They found where they had gathered and explained "The LORD has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon. And they told about the things that had happened on the road and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, (Shalom) 'Peace to you.' But they were terrified and frightened." (Lk 24:33ff) Jesus comforted them, showed them His scarred hands and feet and asked for food to prove He was real.

Thomas was not present at the first gathering of the disciples and when they told him what had happened, he didn't believe. It took another gathering with Thomas present when Jesus appeared to them and showed him His hands and side. Thomas exclaimed: "My LORD and my God!" (Jn 20:28) Jesus appeared to many in the region and remained with them 39 days, teaching them and preparing them to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel for "God has made the curse a blessing" (Deut 23:5)

In Acts 1:8ff Jesus said to His disciples: "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. ...while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." And two men in white apparel stood by them and said: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Rev 22:20, 21: "He (Jesus) who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly'. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

For reflection: What is the significance of Jesus' death? His resurrection? His ascension? His return? Do we have doubts or questions about Who Jesus is?

Prayer: God of all creation, we confess that we are not deserving of your love and grace, for we are sinners. Forgive our iniquities, draw us closer to you and strengthen our faith. Guide us and keep us on the narrow path of righteousness so we will glorify you in all that we do. Give us boldness to be sure witnesses for our Savior Jesus the Messiah. Thank you for providing all things for us, especially thank you for our salvation that comes from Your grace alone by the sacrifice of Your Son our LORD. In Jesus' strong Name, Amen.

Afterword

Jesus, Who was due all respect, esteem and honor was subjected to the worst of public shame, "...even to death on a cross." (Phil 2:6-8) But, throughout the entire time, He proved to be in control. He willingly subjected Himself to dishonor. His goal, to save sinners, was met. The job was complete, finished, perfect (Greek: tetelestai). God's covenant promise was fulfilled. The risen Jesus reigns as "King of kings, LORD of lords". (Rev 19:16) God has highly exalted Him, so that "...at the Name of Jesus, every knee will bow in Heaven, on Earth and under the Earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the glory of God." (Phil 2:9-11)

Jesus, the Christ, Our Great High Priest forever, offered Himself as THE Sacrifice once and for all for the atonement that the Old Testament clearly points to. R.C. Sproul in *The Truth of the Cross* puts it this way: "The Old Testament Scriptures clearly point to the atonement. They show that it was always God's intention that His Son should come into the earth in human form, live as a man under the Law, and die a substitutionary death for His people. The Gospels, in turn, give a faithful record of the events of the crucifixion, and the epistles of the New Testament then provide an inspired interpretation of the work of the Substitute, repeatedly looking back to the Old Testament. And so, by God's grace, we have at our fingertips the facts and the interpretation of those facts by which we may reach, with the Holy Spirit's enlightening aid, a true understanding of what the cross was all about."

Rev. Don Fortner, Grace Baptist Church, Danville, KY comments: "Believing the gospel is believing that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, that the man Jesus of Nazareth actually accomplished all that the Old Testament prophets said the Christ would accomplish."

"For God so **loved** the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jn 3:16) KJV The Hebrew word *hesed* expresses God's love for us better than I can explain. It means "loving kindness", or better still, "steadfast, unchanging love", or even better: "enduring covenant loyalty and love". That is what it means when Paul tells us in Rom 5:8: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

And He was raised from the dead, conquering Satan, sin and death for all of eternity; "the first fruits of them that slept!" (1 Cor 15:20)

Thanks be to God!
Soli Deo Gloria

