



Week of Passion



DEVOTIONS FOR HOLY WEEK

BRIARWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PALM SUNDAY

The Royal Entry Into Jerusalem | Matthew 21:1-11

Royal entries are full of pomp and circumstance, not made on donkeys riding on pathways strewn with makeshift tokens of honor. But entry of the humble and gentle Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophetic prediction of Zechariah (9:9). Here we have Jesus offering the kingdom, and instead, the shallow, enthusiastic crowd ready to have Jesus give them what they want.

His next royal entry will be as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, implementing His eternal kingdom. Upon this entry, every knee shall bow and acknowledge His Lordship. Between them, we live in this marvelous age of grace so beautifully pictured on the cross, when the thief cries out to Jesus and we hear Him say, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." Nowhere in Scripture is the grace of God displayed more clearly than on Calvary. The Perfect Man dies that the wretched man next to Him might be saved.

Jesus continues His appeal every time the gospel is proclaimed. Repent of your sin, call upon Me, and I will give you rest. There are many lessons to be extracted from the triumphal entry. The one to contemplate today is this: Respond to the gentle Jesus with a genuine heart of humility and gratefulness for His offer to us to participate in His spiritual kingdom. Determine to be unlike the misguided crowd that Palm Sunday, who were characterized by a selfish desire to have Jesus give them what they wanted.

MONDAY

The Cursing of the Fig Tree | Matthew 21:18-19

The cursing of the fig tree is a strange event for several reasons. First, the story highlights the enigmatic nature of Christ. We observe His human and divine natures displayed in a common situation. In His human nature, He has expectations that the fig tree would have fruit to assuage His hunger. In His cursing of the tree, we observe His divine nature in the power to immediately effect the wilting of the tree. Second is the seeming insignificance of this event; why record it? And third, the apparent arbitrariness of Jesus' action. What is the point of this incident at this time?

Obviously, the curse was not an act of punishing the tree. There is something far more significant and immediate in view. Matthew has just recorded the cleansing of the Temple where there was bustling religious activity without truth and righteousness. The cursing of the fig tree was a parabolic picture predicting the demise of an unfruitful Israel. While a religious tree filled with the leaves of prayers, sacrifices, rituals and leaders with letters in the law, Israel bore no fruit. Throughout Jesus' ministry He cursed this barren fig tree, and was now about to "plant a mustard seed" that by faith would "turn the world upside down" within a generation.

As you walk through Passion Week, examine your life. Is Jesus finding fruit? Review John 15:1-11. Are you abiding in Christ or are you a candidate for pruning? If the latter, let the parabolic picture of the fig tree move you to repentance.

TUESDAY

Jesus' Authority Challenged | Matthew 21:23–27

On Tuesday, Jesus returned to the temple and began teaching. As He was teaching, the chief priests and elders questioned Him, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” This is not surprising if we imagine the ruckus He caused the day before when He ran the moneychangers out of the temple and declared, “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.” Jesus answers their question with a question and skillfully shuts them down.

Matthew then records Jesus followed this exchange with three parables: Two Sons, Vineyard Tenants, and The Wedding Feast. All three have the same point, and the chief priests and the Pharisees understood it. Matthew says, “...they perceived that he was speaking about them...they were seeking to arrest him...” (21:45–46). Jesus concludes these parables with this statement, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (22:14).

From these Temple controversies we should remember this conclusion which has generated much conflict. The conflict has been construed as Calvinism versus Arminianism, or predestination versus free will. While these are worthy topics to discuss, be encouraged to take Jesus at His word—spend much less effort arguing, and instead, invest your energies in proclaiming the Good News. Focus upon Jesus, “the author and finisher of your faith.” Be engaged in calling the many and trust God with the choosing.

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Anointed at Bethany | Matthew 26:6–13

Judas Iscariot was an intricate member of the twelve; in fact, he was their treasurer. For nearly three years he tramped dusty roads and endured the wrath of the Jewish leaders in hopes of riding the wave of Jesus' ascendancy to power. He had heard Jesus' previous references to His pending crucifixion, but the anointing by this dear lady with the expensive ointment, along with the commendation of her for His burial preparation triggered his disillusionment. Judas determined to cash out what he could by approaching the Jewish leaders to negotiate payment for his cooperation in their capturing Jesus. Matthew tells us that once that decision was made, Judas “from that moment...sought an opportunity to betray Him.”

How often contemporary Christians follow the pathway of Judas! They follow Jesus, sometimes for years, waiting for that which they have set their hearts upon. Sometimes it is business success, sometimes sexual satisfaction. Sometimes it is popularity or some other worldly desire. Then, one day, they realize that Jesus is not attending to their agenda, and they make the decision to betray Him. (Of course, they would not admit to such a thing.) The businessman decides to cheat on his taxes, the husband decides to cheat on his wife, or the one seeking popularity decides to compromise to gain the desired attention.

Jesus and Judas are the two most important figures of Passion Week. Jesus represents the love of God “...in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Judas represents our flesh that would rise up in rebellion and betray this very Christ who died for us. Dear reader, cling to Jesus! Die to self! Avoid becoming a Judas.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane | Matthew 26:36–46

Scripture tells us that Jesus learned obedience (Heb 5:8). The story of Gethsemane displays this emphatically. The human mind cannot comprehend the agony and the ecstasy of this event. But this very conundrum is the point which ministers to us. The agony of Jesus as He anticipates bearing the sin of the world, and in the process experiencing separation from His Father, is depicted for us in that “...His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). The ecstasy is captured in His words, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). In this, He learned obedience. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way, “...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...” (Heb. 12:2).

There are many lessons to be drawn from Jesus’ Gethsemane experience. These may include the value of prayer in crisis, the lack of commitment by the disciples in their tendency to sleep even when asked to pray, and the legitimacy of repeating the same prayer when wrestling with God. However, the most important lesson is, like Jesus, to learn obedience. There is no place like prayer to wrestle our soul into submission. And so Jesus, having learned obedience through His own prayer, rouses His disciples from sleep and calls them to “... pray that you may not enter into temptation” (26:41).

Sincere prayer is the pathway to ecstasy in the Christian life, and the full utilization of the armor of God against the temptations of life (Eph. 6:18). During Passion Week, join Jesus in the agony of learning obedience through prayer—and the ecstasy of submission to your Father’s will.

GOOD FRIDAY

The Crucifixion of Our Lord | Matthew 27:27–61

Crucified! Dead! Buried! What a hopeless situation! Jesus was nailed to a cross, willingly gave up His spirit, and died. Luke reports after the resurrection, Jesus joined two disciples walking home to Emmaus. The hopelessness can be heard in their answer to His query regarding their conversation. Luke says, “...they stood still, looking sad” (24:17).

But in Romans chapter six, the Apostle Paul tells us that rather than being hopeless, it is immensely hopeful. Paul asks, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1) He then recognizes our identity with Christ and our co-crucifixion, co-death and co-burial with Him. Paul concludes, “For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His” (Rom. 6:5). Christians refer to “Good Friday” because we died with Him, and therefore can reckon ourselves dead to sin (Rom 6:11) and alive to righteousness.

If you will incorporate this into your mindset about life, then here is powerful and practical help for whatever temptation with which you may be struggling. Memorize Romans 6:1–11, and when tempted, follow this process: First, turn your attention to the scene on Golgotha, contemplating the fact that as Jesus died for sin, you died to sin with Him. Second, write out a prayer you can immediately offer, ending with, “not my will, but Thine be done.” Third, pick up a pen and begin to write out a song of praise around Romans 6:1–11. Finally, focus your mind on ministering to someone else.

SATURDAY

On the Seventh Day He Rested | Matt. 27:57–60; Heb. 4:1–13

As God rested on the Sabbath following six days of creation, so Jesus rested after the first six days of Holy Week. God views rest as an important dimension of life. Jesus invites men to take His yoke, learn of Him and “find rest” (Matt. 11:29). On several occasions, the Gospel accounts indicate that Jesus, being weary, drew apart to rest. But His rest on this Jewish Sabbath is best understood from His words on the cross, “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46) Here He expresses absolute trust in God. He has done the work of God in the power of God and now He rests in God’s promise.

Hebrews calls us to labor to enter into the Sabbath Rest available in Jesus (4:11). The writer contrasts the rest brought by Joshua in the Promised Land with the rest brought by Jesus through His death, burial and resurrection. While the Israelites had the potential for rest from their enemies in this earthly life, they failed to experience it for the lack of trust in God. In like manner, we often miss out on the rest offered in Jesus for the same reason. “Rest is begun in a trustful heart, and the more trust, the more rest. Much of the weariness of life comes from our own needless, useless struggling...people prefer the toiling and the care of the life of sight to the rest of the life of trust. Return unto thy rest, O my soul.” (The Pulpit Commentary: Hebrews)

Discover how to find this Sabbath Rest in Phil 2:13 and 4:13, Gal 2:20, John 15:1-5, and Psalms 127:1. As the Lord teaches your heart, write out a prayer that expresses to God your desire to enter daily into His rest.

EASTER SUNDAY

Jesus Is Resurrected | Matthew 28:1–8

Could there have been a more exciting day to be alive? The day of victory over death! “Oh death, where is your sting?”

Most of us will come to an Easter service and sing, “Up from the grave He arose...” We will be excited! This is the most glorious day of the church calendar. But how will we live next week? Will we return to our old ways? Will we return to our sin? Will we let the things of this world overshadow Jesus in our lives? Let us not be so critical of the disciples’ lack of belief immediately following the resurrection, but rather learn from them. In the book of Acts some 30 years later, we hear people saying, “these disciples have turned the world upside down.” The resurrection impacted each of their lives. Of course, there is another dimension to the resurrection...it led to His ascension and the fulfillment of His promise to send the Holy Spirit. As believers, we have been co-resurrected with Jesus (Rom. 6:4) and have been given the same gift of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14).

So today make this your prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank You that You died for me and rose again from the dead. Thank You that by faith I have been crucified and resurrected with You. Thank You for the Holy Spirit who lives within me, to empower me to say no to sin and yes to righteousness. Thank You for both Your unconditional love and Your transforming love that You have shed abroad in my heart. And, Lord, enable me to be a disciple who is making disciples. Amen.*



Week of Passion

Palm Sunday, March 29

Services of Divine Worship • 8:00 & 11:00 a.m.
Evening Worship • 6:00 p.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 2

*Communion Service • 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 3

*A Service of Reflection on the Cross • 12:00 p.m.

Resurrection Lord's Day, April 5

Sunrise Service • 6:30 a.m.

Services of Celebration • 8:00 & 11:00 a.m.

Briarwood Music Staff & Professionals in Concert • 6:00 p.m.

**Nursery Reservations are required for Maundy Thursday
and Good Friday services at briarwood.org/nursery.*