



Words from the Holy Week

By

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I shared thoughts about the Holy Week on social media in the days leading up to Easter, 2023.

I highly recommend that Christians study the Holy Week carefully from each of the four Gospels.

Your reward will be great.

The Holy Week

Welcome to what many people call "Palm Sunday." I'd like to encourage you to spend this week reading from all four Gospel accounts about the days leading up to His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Read the verses slowly and carefully with an eye to every detail. Even though the basic story of what happened during "Holy Week" is well known to Christians (as well as some non-Christians), there are many exciting details that are often overlooked. If you read from all four Gospel accounts this week, beginning today with Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 12, you will have a better understanding of what Jesus did and said in the days leading up to His death and resurrection.

Watch for what Jesus did and said, what His followers did and said, and what His enemies did and said. I think you will find the experience eye-opening, as well as encouraging.

May God bless you richly this week as we consider the great Sacrifice of our High Priest - "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2:17-18)

Jesus Enters His Temple

"Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Luke 19:37-38

We know from Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus Christ is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person."

The direction of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is important to note. He was near the descent of the Mount of Olives when "the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

The disciples led the procession toward Jerusalem. Jesus, riding on the back of a colt, began to weep when He saw the city. Why would He weep? Because of what He knew would soon happen to that city - "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:42-44)

That event, the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, happened 40 years later. Jesus wept as He pronounced judgment on His people and the great city He loved.

Jesus entering into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives is significant because of what happened several centuries earlier. Ezekiel the prophet wrote that the glory of the Lord left the Temple and moved toward the east prior to the Babylonian army destroying Jerusalem and the Temple. "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city" (Ezekiel 11:23). The mountain that is on the east side of the city of Jerusalem is Mt. Olivet.

Ezekiel later saw a vision of God's glory returning to the Temple - "And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east" (Ezekiel 43:4). Though I believe Ezekiel's vision is still a future event concerning Christ's return to earth, it is interesting that Jesus came into Jerusalem from Olivet. It was symbolic of God's offer and appeal to His people .. an offer the leaders of Israel had rejected many times before (Old Testament).

What did Jesus do upon entering the Temple? He cleansed it. "Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves'" (Luke 19:45-46). Cleansing the Temple was the first step in what the King of Israel would do to prepare the nation for His earthly reign. However, the priests were disobedient and rebelled against the Messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3).

What happened next between Jesus and His enemies? We'll look at that tomorrow

Opposition in the Final Week

Jesus of Nazareth had many powerful enemies - primarily the religious leaders of Israel. They had wanted to kill Jesus for a long time, but hadn't made their move because they were afraid of the people who followed Jesus.

What finally brought the religious leaders to finalize their plans to kill Jesus was after He raised Lazarus from the grave.

"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.'" And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.'" Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not

for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death." John 11

Jesus visited Lazarus and his sisters in Bethany six days before the Passover. This caused another stir among the Jews that led the religious leaders to also plot to kill Lazarus - "Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus." (John 12)

Jesus entered from Mt. Olivet into Jerusalem to the Hosannas of the crowds the next day. That caused the religious leaders even more problems.

"Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!" (John 12)

What did Jesus do? "And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him."

It took the religious leaders several days to work out their plot leading up to Jesus' arrest, sham trial, and crucifixion. Jesus, who always did and said things intentionally, carried out an amazing feat of teaching in those final days. He was under intense pressure, but was obedient to the will of His Heavenly Father.

We'll learn more about that tomorrow. Keep reading! So much to see in the Gospels about the final days of Jesus before His crucifixion.

Learning From Jesus

Many things to share with you this morning. After Jesus cleansed the Temple following His entry into Jerusalem, the blind and lame came to Him in the Temple and He healed them. Jesus, the Son of God who announced judgment on Israel as He approached Jerusalem (Luke 19), also demonstrated great love and mercy for His people. That is consistent with God's behavior toward His people in the Old Testament. Even as He warned Israel through His prophets, God also demonstrated love and compassion.

The chief priests and scribes saw the "wonderful" things Jesus did by healing people in the Temple, along with people crying out in the Temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!", the Jewish leaders were "indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?" Jesus then left the Temple and went back to the city of Bethany and "lodged there." (Matthew 21)

Jesus traveled back and forth to the Temple to continue teaching during the Holy Week. Remember, Jesus was intentional in everything He did. Some of Jesus' lessons were in the Temple, while others were on the road leading from Bethany to Jerusalem. The withered fig tree that Jesus had cursed was one of those lessons.

The chief priests and elders of Israel continued to confront Jesus as He taught the people in the Temple. They wanted to know what authority Jesus had to teach as He did. Jesus responded with a question He knew they wouldn't answer concerning the baptism of John the Baptist. The people watched as Jesus handled the hypocritical religious leaders with ease.

Jesus used that and other similar opportunities to teach a wide range of lessons during Holy Week. Some of them included the fruitful grain of wheat, the parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked vinedressers, the parable of the wedding feast, and the parable of the fig tree.

Even as the people listened intently to Jesus' teachings, the plotting of the religious leaders became stronger and more pointed. However, Jesus' responses to the leaders were so powerful that "no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore." (Matthew 22)

Jesus also said that people must hear and obey what He was saying to them. Rejecting His Word would be used in the final judgment. "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." (John 12)

After that Jesus pronounced warnings and woes against the religious leaders. Matthew 23 is interesting to read concerning that. Jesus then moved to warnings on Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. He predicted the destruction of the city and the Temple, the great tribulation, and His return to judge the nations. Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Think about what's going on here. Jesus is a few days away from dying on a Roman cross for our sin. He is doing everything and saying everything that God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) determined before the foundation of the world. Everything is going according to God's great plan. That's one of the reasons I highly recommend Christians read the Gospels carefully to catch all the big and little things the Gospel writers shared with us about what Jesus did and said during the Holy Week. The more we know and understand about those last days before the crucifixion, the richer our appreciation will be for all that God has done for us.

Tomorrow, we'll look at private conversations Jesus had with His closest disciples just prior to His arrest and sham trial. What can we learn from His words and deeds?

Good Friday

Christians have used the words "Good Friday" for centuries. The original word may have been used for "God" or "Holy," but the idea is the same. It was a day that had been coming since the Garden of Eden when God told the devil that the "Seed" of the woman would "bruise" his head even as he bruised the Seed's heel. That "bruising" occurred when Jesus died on the Cross.

We've seen during the past few days that the religious leaders of Israel had wanted to kill Jesus for a long time, and finally hatched a plan to do it. The devil was the supernatural force behind the plan and brought it about it in a unique way. It happened during the "Lord's Supper," when Jesus and His disciples met in an upper room. Jesus said many things that were difficult for the disciples to understand that night. Things became clearer to them after Jesus rose from the dead.

During the supper, Jesus said -- "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me' ... Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.'" (John 13) It's interesting that Jesus used the phrase "lifted up his heel against Me." That, I believe, refers back to what God said to Satan in the Garden. As for His statement that one of the disciples would betray Him, the disciples began asking if Jesus if he was speaking about them. "Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.' And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.'" Judas left the room. The other disciples thought Judas was running out to buy something for the feast since he kept the money box, but Judas was really going out to finish betraying Jesus.

That is quite remarkable when you think about it. Demons, also supernatural beings, entered into the bodies of humans and forced them to do things that harmed the human hosts. However, how often have we seen the devil himself enter into a human being to force them to do things he wanted done? This particular event, the devil entering the body of Judas Iscariot to finish the death plot against the Son of God, happened only one time. However, what the devil did was actually bring about his own destruction, as foretold by God in the Garden of Eden. In fact, this was why Jesus came from Heaven to earth - "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8). The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. Lies, deceptions, sin, and death, would all be destroyed by what Jesus accomplished through His death.

Christians who have attended Good Friday services in years past or have read the Gospel accounts of what happened after the Supper, know something about what happened next. Jesus went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, then was arrested when Judas identified Jesus to the armed troops and officers from the chief priests. Judas identified Jesus with the "kiss" of betrayal.

Jesus was taken into custody and the disciples ran away. Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Jesus was hauled from one place to another in what was nothing more than a sham trial. Jesus was mocked, scourged, and forced to carry His own death cross. Jesus was nailed to the cross and died for sin. Satan bruised the Lord's heel. Two religious leaders who secretly believed in Jesus placed Jesus' body in a tomb that had never been used before.

We know what Jesus did, and what was done to Him, but what about what He said? Certainly what Jesus said during that painful and humiliating experience must be important. It is important and I highly recommend that you read all four Gospel accounts today to see what He said during His sham trial, His humiliating walk to the place of crucifixion, and the powerful words He uttered from the cross leading up to His final words - "It is finished." (John 19)

The Gospel of Luke includes some words of Jesus that are very important, but sometimes overlooked in a Good Friday service or other messages about the death of Christ. Those are the words Jesus spoke to the crowds of people who followed Him to the place called "Calvary."

"And 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 for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' 'For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?'" Luke 23

Even as Jesus was about to die and shed His blood as the Lamb of God, He continued to warn the people of Israel of the terrible judgment that God was going to bring on Jerusalem. Even as the women were weeping for Jesus, Jesus told them to weep for themselves and their children. He knew that within 40 years of His crucifixion by soldiers of the Roman army, other Roman soldiers would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, and killed hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Jesus had wept earlier in the Holy Week for Jerusalem because of the judgment that was coming. On the day of His death Jesus told the people of Israel to weep for that same judgment.

What happened the day after Jesus died? We'll look at that tomorrow.

The Day After

What a remarkable day. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God who had become flesh, died on a Roman cross as the Lamb of God who would destroy the sin, death, and the devil. Jesus died and the veil in the Temple "was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27). The Temple veil stood between the priests and the presence of God. Only the high priest was allowed to go through the veil once a year to present a blood sacrifice for his sins and the sins of the people of Israel. God determined if the sacrifice was sufficient. It was at the moment Jesus died. That's why God tore the veil from top to bottom. Jesus' death had made the "way" to God open to all who would believe in Him. Remarkable doesn't begin to describe what happened on that day almost two-thousand years ago.

What about the day after? Keep in mind that the Jewish day begins at sundown. So, my question is what happened after sundown on the day Jesus died.

"Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph observed where He was laid." Mark 15

Joseph and Nicodemus (John 19:39) buried Jesus in Joseph's new tomb (Matthew 27:60). The chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate and asked him to post a guard at the tomb. They were concerned that Jesus' disciples would come at night and "steal" the body and tell people that Jesus had risen from the dead. Pilate told the chief priests to use guards to secure the tomb. The guards sealed the tomb with a large stone, then set a guard so no one could steal the body of Jesus.

Imagine how quiet it must have been at the garden tomb. Just the guards, possibly a fire to keep them warm and give them some light. Jesus' body lay dead in the closed tomb. No way in, no way out.

We can also imagine what was going on with the Lord's disciples. They were afraid and in hiding. The Romans and Jewish leaders had killed their Master. Would they be next? What about the women disciples? They knew where Jesus' body had been buried, so they planned on returning to the tomb after the Sabbath to see if the guards would allow them to anoint His body.

What none of them could know was what Jesus was doing on that Sabbath Day. His body of flesh lay in a tomb, but He wasn't there. Where was Jesus? In Paradise. One of the two thieves who were crucified alongside Jesus became a believer while hanging on his cross. He watched Jesus and heard the amazing words that came from His mouth. The thief realized that Jesus was in fact the Messiah of Israel.

"Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'" Luke 23:42-43

Paradise. παράδεισος in the Greek. What did Jesus mean by that? The word means a garden or park. It was viewed as a pleasant place of rest. The Apostle Paul used the word in 2 Corinthians 12 where he was "caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words." The Apostle John used the word in Revelation 2 - "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

So, where did Jesus meet the thief? Jesus may have meant that the thief would go to Heaven, but He said "today you will be with Me in Paradise," so I'm wondering if it was something else in that particular situation. It would be an event that could never be repeated or replicated. Jesus died once. It wouldn't happen again. The thief would die next to Jesus only one time.

Jesus had taught a parable about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. Both of them died. The rich man went to a place Jesus called Hades. The rich man was tormented and in agony. Lazarus rested in the "bosom" of Abraham. Jesus presented Hades and Abraham's bosom as two separated chambers for those who had died. This is what Abraham said to the rich man - "And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us." (Luke 16)

The words "great gulf fixed" are χάσμα μέγα ἐστήρικται (chasm great has been fixed). The word "chasm" means a wide space, so to call it a "great" chasm gives you the picture of a distance too far to cross or surmount. The word "fixed" is passive voice, which means someone else did the fixing (establishing) of the gulf between the two. God did that. He created the place for the dead.

When Jesus told the thief that he would be with the Lord in "paradise," did He mean the Paradise of Heaven, the paradise of Abraham's bosom, or somewhere else? We don't know for sure, but we do know that the thief was with Jesus after His death because Jesus said he would.

The Apostle Peter said a couple of things that might help us here. When Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost he quoted from a psalm of David and said it referred to Jesus - "he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption." Notice that Peter referred to "His soul" and "His flesh." We know that Jesus' body of flesh was in the tomb until He was raised from the dead. However, Jesus' soul went to Hades. Hades? Might that mean Jesus went into multiple chambers for some reason? Paradise and hades?

We "may" have an answer to that question by what Peter wrote in his first letter - "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water." (1 Peter 3:18-20) Might the "soul" of Jesus have gone into a lower chamber of Hades to preach to supernatural beings, "spirits," who were in "prison" awaiting their judgment. The words "spirits in prison" (φυλακῆ πνεύμασιν) give us that possible understanding. They were "spirits" (wind, breath, spirit) who were in "prison" (under guard). We might wonder why dead people who were awaiting the resurrection to future judgment (like the rich man) would need to be guarded. As we saw with the rich man in Hades, there was no way for him to get out. The chasm was too great.

Peter addressed something similar in his second letter - "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment." (2 Peter 2:4) So did Jude - "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day." (Jude 1:6)

It may be that while Jesus' dead body of flesh lay in the tomb, His soul was busy with the thief who met Him in paradise, and preaching to those angels who had disobeyed Him and were in spiritual "prison." He may have been busy with other things as well, talking with the souls of people who had died from the early days of Genesis. We don't know for sure, but it's interesting to consider that Jesus accomplished a great deal as His flesh lay dead in the tomb.

Tomorrow is a "day" all Christians look forward to seeing. It's the day we remember our Lord's resurrection from the dead. I hope you'll take some time today to read the last chapters of each of the Gospels to prepare your heart and mind for tomorrow.

From Sorrow to Surprise

Sorrow, despair, and fear .. become .. surprise, disbelief, and faith followed by inexpressible joy. I'm speaking of the followers of Jesus Christ who discovered that He had risen from the dead.

When we last saw the Lord's disciples, they were hiding for fear of being arrested and killed. Their hopes for the Messianic Kingdom were dashed when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Their Lord was dead and buried. What would happen to them?

"But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.'"

Matthew 28:5-6

In one amazing flash of glory, the Son of God rose from the dead and changed everything. The world would never be the same again. God became flesh and died to redeem His people. He rose to give them the promise of everlasting life.

Jesus spent Resurrection Sunday talking with many people. He could have risen from the dead and ascended back to Heaven without saying a word to anyone, but that was not His plan. Jesus, the great Teacher, had many more lessons for His followers to learn before He would return to His throne in Heaven to rule and reign.

As you read through Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20, you will see who Jesus spoke to on Resurrection Day and the days that followed. You will learn the lessons He wanted to share with those who love Him, believe Him, obey Him, and serve Him. Hang on every word He said. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth so that you comprehend the words of Jesus at the deepest level possible.

God determined before the foundation of the world, before time began, that the Son of God would come to earth through a virgin birth to become flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

God determined before the foundation of the world, before time began, that the Son of God would be the "way" of salvation for all who believed. "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

God determined before the foundation of the world, before time began, that the Son of God would unite the forgiven to the Forgiver forever. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and

You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:20-23)

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, finished that work on the Cross and through the Resurrection. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to fill us with His love, joy, and peace, and to prepare us to spend eternity with God. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

The blessings of the Resurrection are overwhelming. As Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:3-6)

I pray you have a wonderful Resurrection Sunday and enjoy all the spiritual blessings God has given us. May our hearts overflow with joy as we thank God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - for His Eternal Plan.