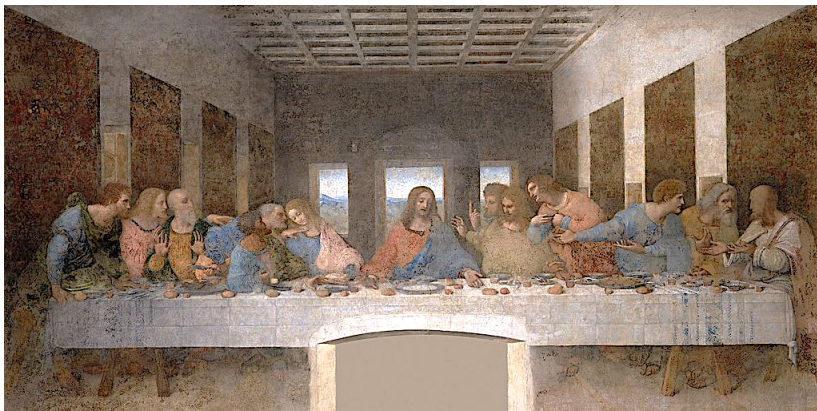


Lest the Cross be Emptied of Its Power

A 30-minute Meditation Booklet on MARK 14-16

WEEK ONE



*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach
the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest
the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those
who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it
is the power of God.*

- 1Corinthians 1:17,18 -

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Meditation Suggestion

Christians should not view Good Friday as a day of leisure, but a day of devotion and worship. In the past years, we have gathered brothers and sisters one week before Good Friday to meditate on the passion of Christ. This has always felt too hasty to commemorate the Word Incarnate and His wondrous work on the Calvary Cross.

This year, we hope to use one entire month to do it. We will read through the passion account recorded in the Gospel of Mark, beginning with Chapter 14. This was the time when Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly "*in the name of the Lord*". It is also the final week before the Lord's crucifixion.

We have a total of four booklets, one for each week; five devotion passages per week, one for each day. Each devotion is divided into four parts: scripture reading, pastoral sharing, personal reflection and prayer. You can also find a few hymns printed at the back of the booklet.

You may set aside 30 minutes each day, meditate on the given scripture passage, sing a hymn, write down your reflection, and end off with a prayer of confession and dedication. I believe your relationship with the Lord will grow deeper.

We have also dedicated four Wednesday *Life Bible Study* sessions that lead up to Good Friday for you to share your learnings. This way we can encourage and edify one another with our spiritual blessings.

Due to this year's COVID-19 outbreak, many of us now have additional time to rest from work and from worldly leisure. Let us use this time to draw near to God to meditate on –

*this **great and mighty Saviour** whose work shook the heavens and earth,*

*this **amazing Grace** which even the angels long to look into,*

*this **Missionary** for whom Abraham willingly forsake his riches and Paul willingly gave up his honoured religious position to follow,*

*this **Word of life** for which generations of godly saints before us did not hesitate to guard with their lives.*

May the Lord wipe off the earthly dust which has settled on our souls, lift the fancy veil which has obscured the sight of our faith, remove the yeast of sin which has been fermenting in our lives, and spur us on to carry the cross once again to follow the Lord Jesus, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power over us.

WEEK ONE: Prelude of the Passion

Day One: The Scheming Heart

Mark 14:1-2

¹ Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ² "But not during the festival," they said, "or the people may riot."

Pastoral Sharing

"Only two days away" - it will be the momentous day that shook the heavens and the earth in the history of mankind. It was the last Passover for the Son of God, and it was also the last Passover for the world. Because Jesus who is the true Passover Lamb that takes away the sins of this world was to be sacrificed in two days. With this, the salvation through the Passover will be accomplished, the world no longer needs to keep the Passover.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law met to make a plan to arrest, accuse and kill Jesus without stirring up a riot among the people. With one hand they held the righteous scriptures but with the other they thrust a false accusation against Jesus. They abused the authority that God had given them to judge sin, and instead used it to get rid of Him whom they were jealous of. Behold how far sin has pushed man down the pit of depravity! But little did they know that God will accomplish His saving work through the very evil works of men. Oh, how great and high is the wisdom of God! This wondrous and amazing salvation has long been revealed to man through the prophecy in Psalms 2:

1 Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

*2 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
3 "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles."
4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.
5 He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
6 "I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain."*

Psalm 2:1-6

Thanks be to God that He cherishes mankind. He does not want to annihilate men from His creation, but to forgive our transgression and restore us to holiness!

The Festival of Unleavened Bread follows right after the Passover, signifying that men are to remove all sins after being delivered. Nonetheless, being impelled by pride and evil, the Pharisees and teachers of the law killed the Saviour on the day of mankind's deliverance! It should have been a day of cleansing, instead they heaped upon themselves another grave sin!

Is your heart just like theirs, deliberately or unknowingly pushing the Lord Jesus out of your life? In what ways have you given all glory due to the Son of God, the King anointed by God?



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication



Day Two: A Beautiful Thing

Mark 14:3-9

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. ⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. ⁶ "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Pastoral Sharing

The alabaster jar is a very expensive vessel, made from a translucent type of clay found only in the caves of the springs. The woman's alabaster jar was filled with fragrant pure nard which is made from the root extract of an extremely rare plant in the Himalayas. It is highly expensive, for such a small bottle, about twelve ounce, can be sold for more than what an ordinary man can earn in the entire year. The jar is sealed and has to be broken in order to pour out the perfume.

The woman broke the alabaster jar and poured the expensive perfume on Jesus' head without hesitation. In those times, this was not an act of humiliation, but of honour. It was as if she was pouring out from her soul all the love and adoration that she had for him, and even then it could not fully express her yearning to follow Jesus with her whole being.

Indeed, the expensive perfume could be sold for charity. The pragmatist would lament "extravagant!" but Jesus said not so, "for she has done a beautiful thing to me", because what she has done is pleasing to the Lord. Even though she did not intend it for his burial, yet within the salvation plan of God, her perfume typifies the aroma emitted from the atonement sacrifice of Jesus' death, and thus has become a beautiful thing in the Gospel.

1 How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.

3 It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

- Psalm 133:1-3

Praise God that He is not a pragmatist! Whatever we do for the Lord, it will be a beautiful thing to Him if we do it with full devotion of our mind, heart and soul. Not a bit of it will be wasted!

It is a shame that we rarely do things solely for Jesus, that is, without any self-interest. A drop of ink will turn the water black. But when we do things for Jesus with undivided love and utmost honour, we will be doing a beautiful thing to Him. So, get rid of the yeast of

self-interest from your donations you give to the poor, the help you lend to your friends, the care you have for your brethren, the service you render in church, your toil at the workplace ... break the alabaster jar, let the aroma of Christ fill the work of your hands. Then no matter how minute it is, it will be a beautiful thing done to your beloved Saviour.



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication



Day Three: The Betrayer

Mark 14:10,11

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Pastoral Sharing

Each time the Bible mentions Judas Iscariot, he is either referred to as Judas who *"betrayed Jesus"*, or it is always about his betrayal. He was one of the twelve chosen disciples. Not only had he witnessed Jesus' divine power, he had also received authority from Jesus to drive out demons and to heal all kinds of illnesses. He had been entrusted with the responsibility of a treasurer, yet he became a thief and often helped himself to the moneybag (John 12:6). Perhaps Judas needed money badly to pay off his debt or to buy a property. Perhaps he was a financial speculator and he thought

that following the Great Miracle Worker was a sure way to great wealth, and was deeply regretful when Jesus did not charge a single cent for all the work he had done for the people. Whatever it was, this passage reveals a stark fact: Judas saw right before his eyes a golden opportunity to get rich, and he could not let it pass.

He decided to end his journey and allegiance with Jesus. He could not wait for the enemies of Jesus to come to him. He went to them, and along with them fell into the deep pit of sin.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

- Luke 9:23

Are you disappointed with Christianity? Do you ponder about ending your discipleship with Jesus? Let us go back to the day when you chose to believe in Jesus. Did you make the decision to follow Jesus hoping to gain something? Blessed are you if you were yearning for holiness and freedom from sin. If what you wanted was better health, a successful career, longevity, prosperity... then rededicate yourself to Jesus for the repentance of sin and devotion to holiness, lest you end up in the footsteps of Judas Iscariot – selling your priceless discipleship for a mere 30 pieces of silver.



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication



Day Four: The Lord's Supper

Mark 14: 12-25

¹²On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." ¹⁶The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover

¹⁷And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" ²⁰He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. ²¹For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

Pastoral Sharing

The Lord Jesus and his twelve disciples were partaking of the Passover meal in a large furnished room. According to Jewish historian Josephus, the law required that there must be at least ten people to one lamb. Every adult male Jew who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem was required to celebrate the Passover there. A

census taken during the reign of Nero revealed that 256,500 lambs were slain at the Passover that year. But today, the true paschal Lamb shall be slain. His deliverance has far more extensive efficacy, it goes beyond time, land and ethnics. This perfect lamb is provided by God – *“On the mountain of the Lord it will be provide.”* (Ge 22:14)

The Passover meal includes the washing of hands, the breaking of unleavened bread, drinking of the cup, retelling the historical account of the Israelites’ deliverance out of Egypt, and giving thanks through prayer and songs of praise. Such is the Israelite’s worship for their Saviour God.

By his foreknowledge, Jesus knew that Judas had sold him. Jesus did not expose him, but warned the betrayer once again *“It would be better for him if he had not been born”*. Each time God issues a warning, it is also an opportunity for us to stop and turn back. Alas, the riches of this world had corrupted the heart of Judas!

The Lord Jesus knew that he is the true sacrificial Lamb of the Passover, the One that takes away the sins of the world. So He declared it the last Passover of the world ^(v25) and elevated it to the Lord’s Supper. From this point onward, he would not drink this cup until the great banquet in the Messiah’s kingdom, where he will drink the new wine with those whom He had redeemed by his own blood. It is a twofold promise: First, Christ has set himself apart as the atonement sacrifice for us. Second, he will be there with us at the great banquet. He will die for us who put our trust in Him. He will live again for us. Death shall be swallowed up and we shall live forever!

*6 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
 a feast of rich food for all peoples,
 a banquet of aged wine—
 the best of meats and the finest of wines.
 7 On this mountain he will destroy
 the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
 the sheet that covers all nations;
 8 he will swallow up death forever.
 The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears
 from all faces;
 he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.
 The Lord has spoken.*

- Isaiah 25:6-8

Do you know that the Lord Jesus is now waiting for us to drink the new wine at the heavenly feast in the Messiah's kingdom? Are you looking forward to it too? The Lord sees your shortcomings, but by his mercy he does not judge you immediately. Through each Lord's Supper, he rekindles our faith to look forward to the joy of partaking the new wine with Christ in the great banquet, that our hearts may be ignited to repent and to turn from evil to good.

Believers of Christ, do not let the Lord's Supper be a mere religious ritual to you. Whenever you respond to the call, do not let your heart be tossed about by the riches of this world, nor your soul stagnant in disappointment and depression. Listen attentively to every word that comes from the mouth of God. Commemorate and celebrate the great and wondrous salvation that has liberated you from the bondage of sin. May your soul be refreshed and your body be strengthened, and your heart be lifted as you look forward to the second advent of Jesus Christ.



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication



Day Five: Prophecy of the Disciples' Fall

Mark 14: 26-31

26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' 28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." 29 Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." 30 And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." 31 But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

Pastoral Sharing

After dinner, as the night was setting in, the Lord Jesus led his disciples out of the room and went toward the Mount of Olives.

The Lord knew this would be the time for "*the shepherd will be struck*", so he told them in advance how they would be scattered in fear when that happens. This was needed so that they may know that the arrest of Christ was not an unexpected failure, but a crucial part of God's salvation plan.

"If I must die with you, I will not deny you." v. 31

They must also learn that religious fervour cannot accomplish God's work. They need the Holy Spirit.

Peter had already left behind his family, his career and his assets to follow Jesus. Without a doubt, he loved our Lord dearly.

He did not expect his faith to fail him. Don't we always think likewise? Let us beware of spiritual pride.

Everything the Lord said came true for Peter and the disciples. We must never let down our guard when we follow Jesus, not even for a slight moment. We can stay strong only when we continually rely on the Holy Spirit with a humble heart.

26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

- John 14:6

How often do you forsake the teaching of Jesus because of a lack of courage? Know that the Lord already foresees every temptation coming your way. He will also prepare you in advance and sustain you with the Spirit of holiness and by the power of His words, that you may rise and overcome even if you have stumbled.



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication

Amazing Grace

By John Newton 1779

1. *Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.*
2. *'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*
3. *Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*
4. *The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.*
5. *Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.*
6. *The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.*
7. *When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.*

Under An Eastern Sky

1. *Under an eastern sky,
Amid a rabble's cry,
A Man went forth to die,
For me! for me!*
2. *Thorn-crowned His blessed head,
Blood-stained His every tread;
Cross-laden He was led,
For me! for me!*
3. *Pierced His hands and feet,
Three hours o'er Him beat
Fierce rays of noon-tide heat,
For me! for me!*
4. *Thus wert Thou made all mine;
Lord, make me wholly Thine;
Grant grace and strength divine
To me! to me!*
5. *In thought and word and deed,
Thy will to do, O lead
My soul, e'en though it bleed,
To Thee, to Thee.*

Lyrics by Albert Benjamin Simpson 1843-1919,

Music by Isaac Hickman Meredith, 1872-1962

Lord I was Blind; I Could Not See

1. *Lord, I was blind; I could not see
In Thy marred visage any grace,
But now the beauty of Thy face
In radiant vision dawns on me.*
2. *Lord, I was deaf; I could not hear
The thrilling music of Thy voice;
But now I hear Thee and rejoice,
And all Thine uttered words are dear!*
3. *Lord, I was dumb; I could not speak
The grace and glory of Thy name;
But now, as touched with living flame,
My lips Thine eager praises wake.*
4. *Lord, I was dead; I could not stir
My lifeless soul to come to Thee;
But now, since Thou hast quickened me,
I rise from sin's dark sepulcher.*
5. *For Thou hast made the blind to see,
The deaf to hear, the dumb to speak,
The dead to live; and, lo, I break
The chains of my captivity.*

Lyrics by William Tidd Matson, 1833-1899,

