An Introduction To Holy Week

The celebration of Holy Week is a Christian tradition that dates back to the 3rd and 4th centuries, and it has been dear to the hearts of many Christians since then. At the culmination of the season of Lent, it is an invitation to walk with Jesus along the last leg of His journey to the cross. It is a chance to see how, as the hour draws near, Jesus makes the most of the time He has left with the people He has walked with over the last three years of His ministry. It is an opportunity to share in the anxiety of the apostles as they see the stakes slowly rising throughout the week, as the religious leaders become increasingly agitated with Jesus and His message. Above all things, it is an opportunity to see that there was a very human price paid so that we might be set free from the weight of our sin.

Real people lived through this sequence of events, and they did not have our benefit of viewing this week in hindsight. They did not know what would happen on the third day after Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. Their joy as Jesus was hailed the Son of David on Palm Sunday turned to confusion in the upper room as He announced, “One of you will betray me.” That confusion turned to terror in Gethsemane as Judas, one of their own, led a mob into
the garden to arrest Jesus. That terror must have become all the more pronounced as Pontius Pilate displayed Jesus before the crowds beaten, bloodied, and hovering on the edge of death. Imagine how their hearts sank as they heard the crowds chant, “Crucify Him!” It’s doubtful we could even begin to imagine the hopelessness as the disciples, who watched the crucifixion and heard their friend utter His last words, “It is finished.”

It is hard for us, having the advantage of hindsight, to ever fully realize the pain of what the apostles went through as they, themselves, walked through this week. It is no wonder they doubted the testimony of the women who reported that Jesus had risen! “We have been through enough” they must have thought, “We can’t bear another set of dashed hopes, not after all we’ve suffered.” Luke’s Gospel recounts the first of Jesus’ appearances to His apostles, stating that they still doubted out of sheer joy, and marveled at the possibility that something so profound could have truly happened. But slowly and surely, the thrill of hope set in. In spite of all they had seen and heard, here before them stood Jesus, their friend. In the same way we may never truly share in the apostles’ pain during the Passion week. It may be impossible to fully understand the depth of their joy. The “Good News” was profoundly good to them, even before they understood it fully. Christ is risen, and death has no power over Him.

The goal of this reading and reflection guide is simple, that you would walk alongside Jesus and His apostles through this week: from His triumphal entry into Jerusalem to His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. My hope is that you would take this time to examine yourself, in light of Jesus’ teaching and in light of His actions. Perhaps, for the first time, this will cease to simply be a Sunday School story for you, but rather a reality; a sequence of events through which real people lived. My prayer is that ultimately, you would prepare your own heart for Easter, which has always
been the way that the Lord intended; to end what occurred in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. May your hearts burn as you draw near to Jesus this week. May you come to know Him in increasing abundance, and may you share with the apostles, and all the saints of history, in their joy and in their triumph, as we proclaim this truth which is foundational to all that we believe: Christ is risen!
How to Use this book

Most modern devotional books have a specific slant to them, they are meant to address spiritual or emotional need in the reader. And so we find devotions meant to tackle stress, or anxiety, or doubt, or sense of self worth. We find others that are intended to educate, and so there are studies for the various books of the Bible. While there is nothing wrong with this, it would be worthwhile to say up front that neither of these categories describe the intentions of this book. This is not an exhaustive harmonization of the four Gospels and how they paint a picture of Jesus’ last week, though a few of those have been consulted. Nor is this a week long journey to experiencing freedom from worry, stress, or financial troubles.

This, rather, is meant to give you the means to meditate on the price paid so that you might end your prayers in Jesus’ name. It is a collection of readings, reflections, and prayers to focus your heart on the cost and the implications of the most important week of the most important life ever lived.

There is no right or wrong time of day for this to happen, though we’d suggest mornings, even if that costs a few
minutes of sleep. It’s helpful to have structure in these things, and so setting up a routine, and including some of these practices will help you get the most out of your time.

1. Turn off your cell phone, television, computer, radio or any other source of distraction.

2. Take several minutes to ask God to prepare your heart to encounter His word.

3. Read the suggested passages and take time to make some notes on what unifies them, the significance of what’s happening, and what this means for us as believers.

4. Read over the commentary.

5. Take time to read through the prayer included, you can make it your own or use it as a jumping off point for your own time of prayer.
The Triumphal Entry

Jerusalem, during the Passover season, was a city which was filled to the breaking point. Scholars estimate that the population of Jerusalem during Jesus’ day was around 50,000. During the Passover feast, those numbers likely swelled up to 120,000, and stretched the cities infrastructure beyond it’s capacity. People filled the hillsides, and lived in tents on the outskirts of town because there was not enough room for them all to be in the holy city at once. Slowly but surely, a rumor spread throughout all the people. It finds its way into the very heart of the city, “Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet who has done many signs and wonders is making His way into Jerusalem.” The people run out to meet Him, and in a world without television or a printing press, this would likely be the first time for many to see the face of this miracle worker from Galilee.

Next they pull palm branches off of the trees surrounding the city, and greet Him as He rides in. The meaning may be lost on us in the modern world. Palm branches were long standing symbols of Jewish nationalism. In the past, when Jewish leaders had rebelled against the empires over them, many had printed palm branches on one side of their currency. The expectation is clear: Jesus, the Messiah has

Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-10, John 12:12-19, Zechariah 9:9
come to throw off the oppression of the Romans. At long last, the revolution has begun.

Jesus however, enters in a way different from what they expected. Not in chariots of gold or on a powerful horse, but riding on a donkey so that He might fulfill the words of the prophet Zechariah. In short, Jesus utterly defies their expectations and turns them upside down. Jesus isn’t in the business of catering to human demands; not during His earthly ministry, and not now, as He intercedes for us before the Father. Perhaps you have expected of Jesus something far less than what He has planned for you. Perhaps, in your own heart, you’ve been waving palm branches. Maybe it’s time you stop making demands of Jesus and allow Him to do the work that He promised He would.

For all of the crowd’s confusion about who Jesus truly is, they make a strangely ironic statement. Continually they shout, “Hosanna!”, an ancient Hebrew word that translates roughly “save us now”. The great irony is that they are expecting to be saved from the Romans, but Jesus has something far greater, more lasting, and more magnificent in mind. Make no mistake. A king entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday but His kingdom is not of this world. That king fully intended to answer His people’s plea, “Save us now” but He meant to save them from something far more destructive than anything the Romans had done; shattering our expectations and calling us to something deeper than what we can understand in our shortsightedness.
Lord, forgive me for my shortsightedness. I have often found myself with palm branches tightly gripped, expectant of something which is far less than what You have planned. Father, as I draw near to You by the work of Christ, would you transform my mind by the work and renewing presence of the Holy Spirit. Rekindle in me a sense of joy and gratitude for the fact that You have answered Your people in the majesty of the Gospel and the atoning work of Christ. Thank You for Your faithfulness as You continue to answer the cry of the repentant, “Save us now.”
The Cleansing Of The Temple

Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-18

Today, in modern day Israel, there is only a single remnant of the temple: an outer wall that would have surrounded the temple mount before it was destroyed by Rome in 70 CE. It is called the “Wailing Wall” because it is a painful reminder of the former glory of the Jewish temple.

The Temple, especially during Passover, was a place of significant importance and filled with both Jews, and Gentile converts to Judaism known as “God fearers”. Having surveyed the temple the day before (Mark 11:11), Jesus begins to pronounce His judgment on the state of the sacrificial system of the people of God. He charges that the house of God, which was meant to be a place of prayer for all nations, has become a den of thieves. We’d do well to note the prevailing attitude among the people of Israel towards the Gentiles during this time: disgust. Because of this, there was a dividing wall that limited how far into Temple grounds the Gentiles were permitted to go. Posted along this wall were signs warning that the penalty for passing the wall as a Gentile was death. It is in the “court of the Gentiles” that the money changers were most likely set up. Among the vendors, pilgrims could purchase animals to be sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins after they had
converted their money into the local currency and paid the temple tax. The problem was that the tax rate was unfair, the prices for the sacrifices excessive, and the worship of the Almighty God had more in common with a crooked business than a house of prayer. For the Gentiles, who were allowed to go no further, this was all that they saw of the God of the Jews: corruption, greed, and dishonesty. There was not even a place for them to pray because of all the business that had become entwined in their holiness.

Jesus’ response is indignant as He begins to flip the tables of the money changers, spilling money and crates of animals onto the ground. For a brief moment, chaos erupts in the temple as He drives the people out; both sellers and buyers alike. Jesus has caused a scene before but this is unprecedented. The crowds are astonished at what He is saying. He’s turning the very fabric of society upside down.

Indeed, Jesus is in the business of doing the same thing even now. If we will let Him have His way, we’ll find that He overturns the wickedness in our hearts and He drives it out with force. If we are to be His people, we will have to do away with the desperate corruption of how things used to be. Those things that would keep people from seeing God for who He is, have no place in the house of God and no place among the people of God. In the mind of the onlookers who had praised Him as He entered, this much was true: the king had come for His kingdom, but it was not going to look anything like what they expected.
Heavenly Father, how deeply we are in need of Your cleansing work in the temples of our own hearts. We have allowed them to become cluttered and unwelcoming, filled with much sin and fear and doubt. Lord, You have promised grace to the humble, but opposition to the proud. It is by this promise, and in humility that we ask that You would cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness, that they might be temples worthy of Your Son. Holy Spirit, we ask that You reveal the tables which must be overturned, so that Jesus might reign as rightful Lord over our affections and our desires.
By What Authority


Jesus, after stirring up considerable controversy the previous day, enters into the temple once again. He immediately draws the attention of the Pharisees who ask Him indignantly, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?”. The question is one impregnated with many other questions and assertions: “What gives you the right to overthrow our customs? Who do you think you are marching in here turning over tables like you own the place? You are the son of a carpenter; you have no right to be teaching the people of Israel as though you’ve been educated.”

Perhaps the true heart of their questions was this: “Who are you to overthrow the way that things have always been, and what makes you think you can tell us how things should be?” Jesus answers by asking another question, “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” The Gospels highlight the Pharisees concern over a conflict they might have with the people if they deny John’s divine message. It is likely that Jesus is forcing them to ask a greater question: If John’s baptism is from heaven, then how much more important is the one about whom John declared, “His sandal I am not even fit to untie”? Jesus is confronting them
with not only what they make of John the Baptizer, but what they make of the message of the one for whom John prepared the way. He confronts us with the same question, “Who do you say I am?” and each person must answer for themselves what they make of the Son of Man. One by one He answers the various religious leaders and their attempts to discredit Him: the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Sadducees. No one can seem to trap Jesus in His words or find a way to incriminate Him.

Had you been one of the apostles, or even a member one of the huge crowds in Jerusalem, one thing would have been clear. By the end of Jesus’ discourse with the Pharisees, and other leaders, He would either become king or He would die...and very soon. He had attracted the attention of Roman authority, no doubt, when He entered in on a donkey in a parade of nationalistic fervor. He had attracted the disdain of the religious leaders as He overturned their tables, customs, and understandings of the scriptures in the courts of the temples. Now He had publicly challenged and criticized the leading religious figures and authorities. All of Jerusalem had become a powder keg, and Jesus of Nazareth appeared to be the spark that would set it off.
Lord Jesus, we have seen the mighty work of Your hand in our own lives and in the cosmos which have been created through You. We confess that often, we have failed to answer correctly the question You posed to Peter, “Who do You say that I am.” Let not our hearts ever grow hardened as those of the teachers of the law, but may we always confess with John the Baptist, The Apostles, and Your people throughout the ages, “Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world.” Lord, ours is a time in which there is not a need for mere confession, but for those who by the Spirit live in power of faith all their days. Give us grace not just to confess in our hearts and with our lips, but to live in light of this tremendous reality.
According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus continued, on Wednesday of His final week, teaching the crowds. Little information is offered about what occurs with Jesus and His apostles during this time frame. But something is going on behind the scenes. Something that the apostles and Jesus’ followers would only become aware of when the events set in motion had come crashing down around them. The high priests had decided that Jesus must die. To them, He was yet another in a long list of heretics claiming to be the messiah, leading the people of Israel astray. When He died, they might have thought the movement would die with Him. So they begin to look for an opportunity; one that would not incite a riot or bring the wrath of the crowds down upon them.

Jerusalem seems to be enamored with Jesus, astounded by His teaching, intrigued by all His talk about the Kingdom of God as though it is looming ever nearer. At last, opportunity presents itself in the form of a man, Judas Iscariot. Not just a follower of Jesus but one His own apostles. For 40 pieces of silver, he agrees to wait for a time to deliver his rabbi over into their hands. Jerusalem not only becomes a powder keg, but a ticking time bomb.
Lord, we have often read of Judas with disdain, failing to realize that his betrayal is our own. Forgive us, for surrendering our confidence in You for things that are far less valuable. We are often led to betray Christ, both by the things of this world and our own wicked hearts. It is in the midst of Judas’ betrayal that You demonstrate Your rich mercy, Father. You have taken what is evil and used it for good. Holy Spirit, remind us often of the mercies of Christ, who remains faithful to us even when we find ourselves faithless towards Him.

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As Thursday dawns, the disciples prepare for the Passover meal; the primary reason that they came to Jerusalem in the first place. Jesus informs two of the disciples to enter into the city and search for a man carrying a jar of water. He will lead them to a guest room already furnished for the meal. It was not customary for men to carry the jars of water during this period. (This has led many to believe that Jesus, earlier in the week, worked this out with one of his devotees in the city as a covert signal to the disciples.) The disciples find it just as Jesus has said, and prepare the meal.

Matthew’s Gospel notes that Jesus makes the statement, “My time is at hand” to His disciples. This contributes to considerable tension and a growing sense of anticipation in the upper room as the Passover meal begins. The disciples still expect Jesus to usher in a political kingdom, and they were concerned with their positions of power within it. Perhaps the disciples expected a planning meeting. Maybe they expected Jesus to explain to them how he was going to overthrow the Romans. Jesus, instead, shows them what
kind of Kingdom His will be as He begins to wash their feet one by one. He has assumed the role of a servant, and a lowly servant at that. He expects that anyone who shares with him in the Kingdom of God would do the same; that His people would be a people filled with a passion for humble service. This does not sit well with Simon Peter, who initially resists the thought of his master taking on such a humiliating position. Jesus issues a statement to Peter, of prophetic importance, to quell Peter’s objections, “If I do not wash you, then you have no share with me.”

Perhaps they expected the talk of revolution to dominate the latter part of their meal. Jesus entertains no such discussion, but instead issues a shocking statement, “One of you is going to betray me.” Judas’ chest tightens, he knows who Jesus is referring to, but how could He know? His agreement with the Jewish leadership occurred behind closed doors, perhaps even while Jesus was busy teaching in the temple. He was careful to make sure no one had followed him. Jesus then hands Judas a piece of bread, declaring, “The one I’ve given this to will betray me.”

Hoping that this is another of Jesus’ parables, and that it is a mere coincidence, he asks Jesus, “Is it I, Lord?” Jesus’ response is cryptic to all but Judas, “You have said so.” His final statement to Judas in the upper room leaves no doubt. Jesus knows what is about to happen to Him. Jesus looks at Judas and declares to him, “What you’re going, do quickly.” Judas departs, knowing that he has been found out; knowing that what he thought he had kept a secret had never really been a secret to Jesus.

Jesus then takes the passover bread and, afterwards, the wine. He likens both of them to His body which will be broken and His blood which will be poured out. As often as the disciples eat and drink of this cup, He says they will remember Jesus’ actions and what he accomplished. The apostles, at this point, may very well have been distressed.
Jesus’ talk of betrayal, blood being poured out and His body broken, did not sound like the beginning of the kingdom which they were anticipating.

He then leads them to a garden within the city, Gethsemane, and takes a few of His apostles further. He pleads with them to keep watch and pray as He, Himself, needs time to prepare for what is to come. Jesus then ventures off on His own, deeper into the garden, He becomes increasingly distressed as the significance of what the next several days will bring begins to crush Him. He collapses on the ground, pleading with the Father for another way, He resolves to Himself: if this is the only way, then I will see it through to the end.

J.I. Packer discerns that even in His agony in the garden, Jesus is still teaching us. Specifically, He is teaching us how we ought to pray in our own difficulty, surrendering our struggles ultimately to the Father as He did. Jesus does not demand of us what He Himself will not do. “Not my will but yours be done” is a dangerous prayer, but a necessary one. We may not be called to surrender our life unto death as Jesus was, but we are all called to take up our cross and put to death our sin. Such surrender is difficult, and it requires us to examine ourselves in light of God’s character and His will.

As Jesus returns, He finds the apostles asleep, and completely oblivious to His agony. They are completely unaware, as we often are, of the profound emotional weight that their master bore as He readied himself to carry out the Fathers will. They will understand in time, but for now Jesus tells them to rise and brush the sleep from their eyes. Judas has returned.
Gracious Father, You sent us a truer and better Adam who remained steadfast when tested in the garden. We, who You have called to bear Your image, for communion with one another and with You, thank You for giving us a means by which both may be achieved. As we come to your table, we are reminded of the one body under Christ to which we belong. Even as we are reminded that through the second Adam we can meet with You freely. We, who are spiritually lame even as Mephibosheth (2 Sam 4:4) was physically lame have been brought to your table to feast, and it is Christ who is faithful to carry us there. Holy Spirit of God, would You stir up in us a sense of wonder in You as we are faithful to come to the table of the Lord as Your people.
Behold The Lamb Of God

*Matthew 26:47-68, John 18:28-38, John 19*

Judas enters the garden with a crowd of people, most likely early on Friday morning, before the sun has come up. The Apostles are bewildered, angry, confused. Then Judas approaches Jesus to greet Him with a kiss; the sign he has informed the crowd will indicate which of the men is actually Jesus. The kiss of greeting in this culture was also a traditional sign of affection and loyalty; the irony is painful.

Jesus rebukes Judas, but gently, “Friend, do what you came to do.” With their target now clear, the crowd seizes Jesus. One of the apostles (revealed in the Gospel of John to be Peter) draws his sword. Perhaps Peter’s motivations are mixed. Maybe he thinks that this is the beginning of the revolution. He is also undoubtedly concerned with protecting Jesus who seems to go willingly, rather than resisting the crowd. In the confusion, Peter cuts off the ear of one of the members of the crowd. Jesus rebukes him. Jesus has begun the final stage of ushering in His kingdom, and it will not be a place of violence. His people will not live and die by the sword; they will live by faith and the guidance of the Spirit. He then addresses the cowardice of the crowd; He has taught in the temple throughout the week so why not arrest him then? After this He is led away and His friends flee in terror.
While it is still dark, before the sun has risen, a substantial series of events takes place. Jesus is led to the house of the high priest, where he is formally charged under Jewish law in the presence of witnesses who testify falsely against him. Throughout the trial, Jesus remains silent, unwilling to respond to the charges against Him, until Caiaphas asks Him directly, “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus’ response is of the utmost importance. Should he reply that He was not, is to render him a free man. To say that he was indeed the Christ, is to seal His fate. He responds in a clear but careful way: Syeipas. Translated, it means ‘That is your way of putting it.’ Indeed, Jesus was more than they could have possibly understood, and more than the phrases of man could contain. This statement is enough. Jesus must die. He had claimed things of Himself that, even if they were untrue, were the equivalent of blasphemy. The Jewish leadership however, did not have the power to enact capital punishment, so they needed to present Jesus to the Roman authority for conviction, if He was to be executed. As morning dawns, Jesus is led to the house of Pontius Pilate, in the hopes they can convince him that Jesus is a threat to Roman rule.

What happens over the course of the morning is complex. Jesus is a hot topic that men of power are afraid to touch. Pontius Pilate, is unwilling to convict, so he attempts to place the burden on Herod. Herod, in turn, is more concerned with seeing the miracle worker from Galilee than sentencing Jesus, and so Jesus is sent back to Pilate.

The Gospel of John chooses not to focus on this legal game of hot potato but rather records the specific details of Pilot’s interactions with Jesus. The Romans care nothing for Jewish charges of blasphemy, but a man claiming to be king?... this was a threat to Roman peace, and a threat that
had often been answered with death! Pilate begins his trial by asking a simple, but loaded question, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus responds to Pilate simply, “My kingdom is not of this world.” It is an answer that was perhaps cryptic at the time, but would become all too clear as the church spread throughout the Roman Empire.

The crowd has been incited. Charges of blasphemy were serious and would be enough to cause any devout Jew to quickly change their opinion on this prophet from Nazareth. Pilate attempts several times to release Jesus. He has said nothing that would incriminate him directly. He has Jesus flogged, mockingly dressed as a king, and presents him to the crowd once more. The calls for Jesus’ crucifixion intensify. Pilate makes a judgment call. It’s far better to have this man die than risk restlessness in Jerusalem. With all the crowds, intentionally or not, this man has become a threat to Roman peace, so he chooses to condemn Jesus of Nazareth to death on a cross; the punishment reserved for enemies of the state and insurrectionists. He’s lead through the city with the wood cross beam on His back. Other gospel accounts mention that Jesus, at some points, seemed physically unable to go on, so the guards pull in a member of the crowd to help Him carry the heavy wood structure. He is nailed to the cross in between two thieves, and mocked with an inscription on His cross calling Him, “King of the Jews.” During this whirlwind of events, John offers us a small window into the human cost of this moment: at the foot of the cross stands His mother, and some of the women who had followed Him. Nearby is John, the disciple whom Jesus had loved so dearly. Many of the apostles were likely in hiding, for fear of what might happen to them, but for John, Jesus was too dear to Him. He’d stay by his side, till the end.

After the near constant physical abuse, the Roman flogging, and the trauma of the crucifixion, the end came quickly. Jesus of Nazareth died in the early afternoon on
the Friday after He had entered Jerusalem in triumph. No one would even be able to recognize him as the man who had overturned the tables in the temple earlier in the week. He has been beaten and tortured beyond recognition.

We would do well to mark His final words, “It is finished”, for it is not just a recognition of mortality, rather the period at the end of what God has been guiding human history towards since the Fall of Man. Today, it would be worthwhile to reflect on how profound that statement is. Whether we recognize it or not, the whole of the universe responded. Other Gospels recount creation’s violent reaction to the death of its creator by the earth shaking and darkness falling over the land. It was as if the universe, itself, recognized the power of what had happened.

Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus early on in His ministry, would honor this teacher in His death by bringing spices for his embalming. Jesus, likely a poor man with no family tomb, had no place for His body to rest. Joseph of Arimathea, who had followed Jesus in secret, would offer his own personal tomb as the final resting place of this teacher of Israel. And so, the Son of Man was buried in the tomb of a rich man, and his friends are left to wonder what is next for them.
Gracious Father, who did not even spare his own son. We rarely reflect on the magnitude of what it has cost that we could offer our prayers in Jesus’ name. In our sin we do not recall that it was not just Christ who was put to death on the cross, but our old nature of sinfulness has died with Him. Holy Spirit, bring to our remembrance this great reality: that we have been crucified with Christ, and have died to the systems of the world which once held dominion over us. Bind these great truths to our hearts that we might day by day have the strength to live by them.
Apart from the Gospel of Matthew’s note that a set of soldiers were sent to guard the tomb, we know nothing about what happened on the day following Jesus’ crucifixion. Though we are firmly in the realm of speculation, it is not unreasonable to assume that John and the apostles, who dared to stand in the crowd during the execution, recounted Jesus’ final words to those who were too fearful to leave their hiding places.

No doubt, much discussion surrounded them: “What did He mean when He said that it was finished? Did He really ask God to forgive them after all they’ve done?” The sense of grief must have been overwhelming. Their friend and teacher to whom they had committed the last few years of their lives had been publicly humiliated and led to his death. The very crowds, who called Him the “Son of David” only a week ago, had turned on Him so quickly. And what of this kingdom He had so often spoken about? Was He mistaken? Maybe they could go back to fishing and try to forget all that they had seen. Maybe they were too overcome with grief to see beyond the next few hours, let alone their inevitable shameful return to their families where they would have to announce that the man they had trusted was not who they thought he was. There could be no such
kingdom with its king buried in the ground. Who were they to have thought that uneducated fisherman, and reviled tax collectors like themselves, had really been a part of God doing something new and unique among his people? The disciples, as we often do in our own walk, must have battled heavily with doubt. It seemed as though all that they had committed their lives to had died on the cross along with Jesus, and they were left to pick up the pieces and start over.

Prayer

In The Dust Of Death

Suffering, victorious Savior, You never doubted Your Father. Even as you experienced the agony of being abandoned by Him on the cross, You trusted Your Father to keep His promise to You and raise You from the dead. Now Your perfect faith is ours, and we live confidently in the joy of Your obedience credited to us. Although we walk through this life as poor, wretched, and needy sinners, we are clothed with Your goodness, and we are participants in Your endless victory over death. Powerful Holy Spirit, help us to be children who live by faith, and not by sight. Impress upon us the reality of what we cannot see, Jesus’ hands in heaven, forever bearing the scars that proclaim that the punishment for our sins has been paid in full.

Taken from, “Prone To Wander: Prayers of Confession and Celebration”
Easter Sunday

The Living Among The Dead

_Easter morning is one that began with a great deal of confusion. A group of women come to the tomb of Jesus to anoint the body only to find the tomb empty and the stone rolled away. In the confusion, some go back to the apostles, others enter the tomb. Some of the apostles run to the tomb to confirm what they’ve been told, while other women claim that they have encountered angels. The picture the gospels paint is entirely understandable. In their emotional turmoil, the followers of Jesus are frantically running to and fro, attempting to understand what has happened. Was it not enough to just kill him? Now Jesus’ enemies have stolen the body so that he can’t even be honored in death. Slowly but surely, various accounts begin to reach the eleven remaining apostles. No longer is there just talk of people seeing angels, but of people seeing Jesus himself. And these accounts aren’t simply coming from those who have been to the empty tomb. There are some among them who have claimed to have walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, and that He broke bread with them. They say that their hearts burned when they talked with Him, just like it used to when He had taught in the synagogues._

The apostles likely responded with confusion and doubt. Those who had followed Jesus in His life had been under
a tremendous amount of emotional turmoil for the last few days. Surely this must be the result of exhaustion, maybe even a ghost, but certainly not some bodily resurrection. True enough, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, but with Jesus dead who was it that would raise Him? Behind locked doors, they discuss these things, wondering what they could mean. It’s there that it happens; without the sound of forced entry, without the creaking of the door, Jesus is present among them. The room erupts into chaos, but Jesus issues a familiar Jewish greeting, “Peace be with you”. Beyond our modern understanding, the Hebrew word ‘Shalom’ implied a peace that resulted from the good hand of God being upon someone. Jesus issues this statement to His apostles, and for the first time in human history, the word can be used in its fullness. Indeed, the hand of God has moved in a powerful way, and His peace can now be known as it never was before. In this symbolic gesture, the weeping, the sorrow, the doubt, and the grief of the last week, and the last 3 days dissolves. “The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord”, John recounts. This, perhaps, does not do justice to their sheer joy. We may never fully understand it until we, ourselves, see the risen Lord Jesus with our own eyes.

Thomas, who was not present during these events, remains doubtful. Until he puts his hands in the marks of the crucifixion, he simply cannot believe what he is hearing. Thomas is probably more like any of us than we will ever admit. In our age of empirical evidence, we have the need for exhaustive proof of even the smallest details before we will accept what we’re told. “Prove to me that He is alive”, Thomas might say, “…and that you have not simply suffered a break in sanity.” Our society echoes the same concern, “Miracles do not happen; people do not rise from the dead; show me the proof.” But less than a week later, Jesus confronts Thomas’ doubts in person. Suddenly, Thomas doesn’t need to understand how it is that this has happened, because he is confronted with the reality of the
risen Lord. The risen Lord is still confronting and defying our unbelief as he did with Thomas, through the reality of his presence. John concludes this section of his gospel with an explanation. Jesus has done far more than what he is able to even record, “but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”. Indeed, the fullness of life cannot be found anywhere else.

Thomas issues a profound statement in the presence of Jesus, “My Lord, my God!” He proclaims. May we ever do the same when we encounter the risen Jesus, and may we share in the apostle’s joy today as we proclaim what became for them a profound and life changing truth: Christ is risen.

**Prayer**

*In The Dust Of Death*

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O Father, is Your mercy and loving kindness to us, that to redeem a slave, You gave Your Son. In so doing, You have restored us to right standing and relationship with You. The way is now open that we might have fellowship with Christ, the one in whom all the promises of God find their yes. We have taken this gift for granted, and failed to rejoice that we have seen the day which the saints of old longed to. Holy Spirit, would You renew our passion and desire to live in light of the atoning work of Christ Jesus. To carry our own crosses as He carried his so long ago, to pour ourselves out for His kingdom as He emptied himself for our salvation.

*Expanded and adapted from, “The Book of Common Prayer: The Great Vigil of Easter.”*
References and Inspirations

The following books helped influence the writing and content of this book. Special credit is given to:

The Holy Bible - English Standard Version (ESV)

The Final Days of Jesus, Andreas Kostenberger and Justin Taylor

Prone To Wander: Prayers of Confession and Celebration, Barbara R Duguid and Wayne D Houk

NIV Application Commentary: Matthew, Michael J. Wilkins

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The Anglican Book of Common Prayer

A Harmony Of The Gospels, A. T. Robertson

Other Recommended Resources

The Cross of Christ, John Stott

The Final Days of Jesus, Andreas Kostenburger and Justin Tylor

50 Reasons Jesus Came to Die, John Piper