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Preface

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31).

God’s eternal plan of salvation is unwrapped in the life of Jesus and in the Scriptures. His last week and hours are intense, soul searching and worthy of our contemplation. The week of passion is clothed in emotions, compassion, forgiveness, pain, suffering and unspeakable joy. In His desire to please the Father in heaven and for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame. He did this for you and me. The question is: What will you decide to do with this understanding by the end of the week?



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Sunday --- Behold Your King!

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 21:1-11

Mark 11:1-11

Luke 19:29-44

John 12:12-19

When Jesus first started His ministry, John the Baptist saw Him and said to Andrew and another of his disciples “Behold the Lamb of God.” These two disciples left John to follow Jesus. Jesus turned and asked the disciples that came to Him, “What do you seek?”

And now after three years we read that the disciples were still following Him. They ate with Him, slept with Him and saw Him transfigured. They watched Him change the water to wine, heal the blind, set the demon possessed free, raise the dead and forgive the sinner. Jesus walked on the water, calmed the seas, and fed the thousands. These were miracles that only God could do.

“What do you seek?”

Remember in Matthew 16:13-20 when Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say I, the Son of Man, am?” They said that some thought John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus then asked them, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered and said that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

The claims of Jesus caused a great stir among the people. In John 8:58 Jesus claimed to exist before Abraham as the “I am.” In the Gospel of John Jesus stated that He was the “Bread of Life,” the “Light of the World,” the “Door,” the “Good Shepherd,” the “Resurrection and the Life,” the “Way, the Truth and the Life,” and the “True Vine.” Was He lying or telling the truth?

“Who do you say I am?”

In our scripture readings for today, we read in Matthew 21:5 “Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey.” This is in fulfillment of a prophecy recorded in Zechariah 9:9 by the prophet Zechariah over 500 years prior to its fulfillment. Yes, these are the pages of God’s eternal plan of salvation being turned in time, but not understood by His disciples until Jesus had been glorified (John 12:16). The multitude cried out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 19:38). The Pharisees were beside themselves because “the world is gone after Him” (John 12:19). They wanted Jesus to silence the people as the people rejoiced in Him (Luke 39-40). The entire city was saying “Who is this?” (Matthew 21:10). Finally, we see Jesus weeping over their ignorance and declaring the judgment that would come upon the people as a result of their unbelief (Luke 19:41-44).

The Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One Who is, Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8) is waiting for you to draw near to Him. Will you by faith draw near to Him rejoicing in the God of your salvation? Or, will you let the stones cry out (Luke 19:40)?

“Who is this?”

Monday --- Take Heed, Have Faith!

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 21:12-22 Mark 11:12-26
Luke 19:45-48 John 2:13-22

Would the cursing of the fig tree and cleansing the temple fit into Dale Carnegie's book "How to Win Friends and Influence People?" Was Jesus having a bad day in need of a cup of coffee, or taking out frustrations on the fig tree? No! This is far from the case. The cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple thieves were purposeful and to the glory of God. Let us take heed to what He said and did prior to His crucifixion because He was always about His Father's business (Luke 2:49).

Just the day before, the people had been rejoicing in Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and loudly proclaiming Him King. So, what is the meaning of cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple?

Simply put, Jesus was hungry, found no fruit on the fig tree that was out of season, and He cursed it (Mark 11:13). He was God, but He was also man, and hungered as other men (Matthew 21:18).

Pray, Believe, Receive

The next day the disciples marveled, seeing the fig tree withered from the roots (Mark 11:20). The lesson becomes clear to the disciples as Jesus exhorts them, and us, to have faith and not to doubt: "Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). This alone should encourage us to pray in faith.

While praying are you holding grudges against someone? Jesus said, "If you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:22-26). Praying in faith and praying with a forgiving heart are closely linked together in these passages.

Forgive

This day for Jesus is not over. As He entered the temple of God, instead of finding it a place of prayer, the people were making money. This sin did not go over too well with Jesus, and in His Holy zeal He overthrew their tables. This may have not been the only time that Jesus overthrew the tables of those who were turning the Lord's house into a den of thieves (John 2:13-22). How much discipline does it take to learn the Lord's lessons?

In the midst of all this commotion the blind and the lame did not stop coming to Him for healing. As a result, even the children were rejoicing in Jesus. They shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21:14). The chief priests, scribes and the principal men said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes, and have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants, You have perfected praise'?" (Matthew 21:14-16). Instead of rejoicing with the multitude and with the teachings of Jesus, the chief priests, scribes and principal men sought to destroy Him (Luke 19:47-48). Envy and anger was blinding them from the truth.

Do we seek Him in prayer, believing? Are we zealous for the things of God? Or, are we upset with Jesus? Do we complain and attempt to destroy the very causes of Jesus? Will you take time now and give Him thanks for your many blessings and answers to prayers?

Be Thankful, Worship Him

Tuesday --- How Can You Escape?

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 21:20-26:16 Mark 11:20-14:11

Luke 20:1-22:6

John 12:20-50

The Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes were the leaders, priests and lawyers of the community during the times of Jesus. They were distinct parties and set themselves up as religious guides for the common people. Did they view Jesus as just another leader of another sect that challenged their beliefs? What we do see is that in their pious clothing they were a little irate with Jesus, Who was drawing the multitudes to Himself.

The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes were obviously not listening to, or believing in Him (John 12:37). In fact, their response to Him was very cynical. They were all teaming up together and seeking to find fault in Jesus' answers to their questions. They asked by what authority He did those things. (Matthew 21:23). They sought to lay hands on Him but did not because they feared the multitudes who believed that He was a prophet (Matthew 21:46). The Pharisees, took counsel how they might ensnare Him in His talk (Matthew 22:15). The Sadducees questioned Him about the resurrection which they did not believe in (Matthew 22:18, 28-33). The Pharisees asked Him what the greatest commandment was in the law (Matthew 22:34). The chief priests and the scribes continued to seek how they could put Him to death (John 22:2).

The stage is set, and their plan unfolds. The Scriptures state that Satan entered Judas Iscariot, and Judas then went to the chief priests and captains who were sitting around scheming how they might kill him. Judas offered to deliver Jesus into their hands. After listening to Judas' proposition, they "licked their chops" with twisted joy and agreed to pay Judas thirty pieces of silver to do it (Luke 22:1-6; Matthew 26:14-16).

This same day Jesus verbally chastised the religious leaders. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites, you blind guides, you sons of hell, you white sepulchers, you serpents, you offspring of vipers (Matthew 23:13-36). Jesus then laid the big question on them, "How can you escape the condemnation of Hell?" (Matthew 23:33).

How can you escape?

I do not hear them say to Jesus that there are many roads to heaven or to God; that they were righteous and without sin; that their sacrifices, offerings or good deeds would remove the guilt of their sins; or, respond jokingly by stating they would party in Hell with their friends. No, this was a serious question to them, and it's a serious question for us today, since we all are guilty of sinning. The question still remains on the table: "How can you escape the condemnation of Hell?" We will all live forever. The question is where will we live: Hell or Heaven? Of course, we want to live in heaven, but how can we escape this condemnation on our own? Bottom line is that we need a Savior, and for all who repent from their sins and trust in Jesus, they will escape the condemnation to come (John 3:16-21, 36). Mary, the mother of Jesus, rejoiced while Jesus was still in her womb, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). She too needed a Savior and rejoiced in her Savior. Will you?

Rejoice in our Savior Jesus

Wednesday --- Come, Lord Jesus!

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 24:1-25:46 Mark 13:1-37

Luke 21:5-38

Let's reflect more on what Jesus said yesterday. Imagine placing your arrow of life in a bow, drawing it back and releasing it. What target are you aiming at in life? What do you hit? The Bible teaches that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Jesus was very intentional of His target. He came with a purpose, and He hit the bull's-eye. His purpose was to do all that the Father commanded Him to do. He came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). To the glory of God, His mission was accomplished. Forgiveness of sin came at a great price, a price you and I could not pay. The Scriptures teach us that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13-14). Who can condemn us if we believe this (Romans 8:31-35)?

All have sinned

Savor this for a moment: God was reconciling man unto Himself through the shed blood of Jesus. The penalty for our sins was paid by Jesus Christ's death, removing our debt and guilt. The Divine Judgment was satisfied, and now by faith in Him we have peace with God. "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). For sure, the hope of our salvations rests upon the completed work of Jesus. How can man be saved if he rejects God's way of salvation?

Jesus spoke about His coming death and resurrection several times in the Scriptures, and it happened just as He said. Now that in itself is good enough reason to believe what He declares about His second coming. The condition in the world gets worse before it gets better; but there is hope. He is on the throne of God and in complete control. Be aware of the signs, and most importantly keep your eyes fixed on Him. As the signs of His second coming come to pass, Jesus exhorts us to lift up our heads for our redemption draws near (Luke 21:28).

The details are given in today's Scripture readings: There will be famines, earthquakes, wars and rumors of wars; the love of man will grow cold; the Gospel will be preached to the ends of world; the abomination that causes desolation will occur; and, there will be false prophets and false christs performing deceitful signs and wonders. It becomes so bad that unless those days are shortened, no flesh will be saved (Matthew 24:22). Don't worry and don't fear. He declared that He is coming in the clouds to gather His elect from the earth's four corners (Matthew 24:29-31). Are you ready? Are you trusting in Him? Are you living for Him, for His purposes and for His glory? If not, maybe it is time to shift your target in life. Life is short in this world; it is but a vapor in the light of eternity. If you trust Him right now, be thankful, for He has promised never to leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). The very end of the Bible reads: "Even so, come Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen" (Revelation 22:20-21).

Come, Lord Jesus!

Thursday --- Last Supper!

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 26:7-35

Mark 14:12-31

Luke 22:7-38

John 13:1-17:26

In the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” the big, bad wolf deceived and devoured first Grandma and then cute Little Red Riding Hood. A hunter who was passing by the cottage found the stuffed wolf fast asleep and snoring. Instead of shooting the wolf, he cut his stomach open, and out popped Little Red Riding Hood and Grandma.

The Word of God warns us that the big, bad wolf, Satan, ensnares many through deception; that He is a liar, thief and murderer; that He is the prince of the air (Ephesians 2:2); and that He is able to disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Who knew this better than Peter who was sifted like wheat by Satan (Luke 22:31-32)? Peter learned his lesson and wrote, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We too must watch and pray. Jesus warned us when He said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Jesus destroyed all notions that there are many ways to God and emphasized that He is the only way to the Father. The consequences of Little Red Riding Hood’s choices do not compare with the eternal warnings found in the Word of God. She landed in the wolf’s stomach. Our choices here on earth can land us either in Heaven or Hell for all eternity. What will it be?

Remember Moses? Prior to God leading His people out of Egypt, the angel of death passed over each first born of the family that had the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and lintel of their house (Exodus 12:1-14). Similarly at the Passover meal Jesus gave the bread and wine to His disciples and said, “This is My body that is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me, and this is the blood of the new covenant shed for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:19-20). We all need to eat and drink! Forgiveness of sins brought peace with God for the journey. He reminded them that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep and that the servant is not greater than the Master. Jesus exhorted them to clothe themselves with humility and with a servant’s heart by washing their feet. Jesus made it clear that He chose them to go and bear fruit (John 15:16), and that they should abide in Him. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was their Guide, Teacher and Comforter. Likewise, our burdens for this journey will obviously become much lighter as we trust Jesus, abide in Him, maintain a right heart attitude, pray and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

What will it be?

I guess you never dreamed of going on this journey, but aren’t you glad that He chose you to do so? He is there and will never leave you nor forsake you. Are you thankful that you came to your senses and escaped the snare of the devil? If so, tell Him!

Tell Him!

Friday --- Paid In Full Once For All!

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 26:36-27:61 Mark 14:32-15:47

Luke 22:39-23:56 John 18:1-19:42

Life seems so confusing when something happens that we did not expect. I knew a young Christian couple, and their desire was to put God first. They had two lovely children and love was in the air as they were sacrificing, working hard to make ends meet and live out their dream. In a moment their life changed while he was working on an oil rig. The hammer of the rig crushed his head and killed him instantly. At his funeral, one of the relatives who loved him dearly, who was grieving for her who was now left alone to raise their children, and seeing no purpose in his death said to me, “What a waste!”

Where was God?

When something terrible happens and no one is able to explain the reason why, there is the temptation to blame God for not changing the outcome and to ask bitter questions: “Where was God?” or “What purpose could God have in this?”

What evil did Jesus do to deserve His death? In His last moments, He was betrayed by a kiss, denied by Peter and falsely accused by the religious leaders. Pilate and Herod could find no wrong with Him, but yet the people shouted “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” The soldiers spit on him, beat him, whipped him, mocked Him and humiliated Him. Deprived of food and sleep, they made Him carry His cross, stripped Him and nailed Him to the cross between two criminals. The crucifixion occurred around 9:00 that morning. While on the cross and in front of the ones He loved, the people continued to mock Him for six hours. From 12:00 to 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon darkness fell over the land. At 3:00 p.m. Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Again He cried out and yielded His spirit to the Father (Luke 44:46). The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked, rocks were split, and the graves were opened. Many bodies of the saints who had died were raised, came out of their graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared to many (Matthew 27:45-53).

That “The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” is significant. In the temple the veil was a large, heavy material that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the sanctuary. Once every year on Passover the High Priest went behind the veil, and as he sprinkled blood on the altar, he offered prayers and atonement to God for the sins of the people. The veil symbolized that man could not approach a Holy God in his sins. But, when Jesus died on the cross that day, the veil was torn from top to bottom. God was saying to all who have sinned, “The way to God is through the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:19-20).

They crucified Him because He did not deny that He was the “King of the Jews” and the “Son of God.” Forgiveness of our sins cost Him His life, and we can now boldly approach God through faith in Him. This deserves more than just our thanks; it demands our worship of Him.

Forgiveness of our sins cost Him His life

Saturday --- Mourning Time!

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 27:62-66

Joseph of Arimathaea, a secret disciple for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Once Pilate confirmed that Jesus was dead, he agreed (Mark 15:44-45). Remember Nicodemus? He is the one who came by night to ask Jesus how one could have eternal life (John 3:1-21). He helped Joseph. The two of them took Jesus down from the cross, laid Him in the tomb and rolled a stone in front of it. Jesus was sealed in the tomb on Friday before their Sabbath (John 19:38-42).

In Jesus' last breathing moments on the cross He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). The chief priests and Pharisees just won't quit, and the saga goes on in their attempt to maintain their own righteousness! It wasn't enough to have Jesus crucified and numbered with the transgressors (Luke 22:37). They requested Pilate to have His legs broken. Jesus would then die even faster and not pollute their Sabbath day with His dead body on the cross (John 19:32-37). Then they remembered that Jesus said, "After three days I will rise," and back to Pilate they went! Pilate was probably asking himself, "Will this ever end?" They reasoned with Pilate and requested that he post a guard in front of the tomb. They thought that they would have a bigger problem if the disciples stole the body and deceived the people by saying that 'He is risen from the dead' (Matthew 27:62-66). Pilate gave them what they wanted. Who is deceiving who?

Sealed in the tomb

Peeking ahead and turning the pages of time, their lying and deception continued after the resurrection. The soldiers reported the resurrection to the chief priests who then bribed them with a large sum of money to tell the governor that the disciples stole His body (Matthew 28:11-15). After His ascension back into heaven, we read that a man who was lame for forty years (Acts 3:1-10; 4:22) was healed by Peter in Jesus' name. The high priests, rulers, scribes, Sadducees, the captain of the temple, Caiaphas and their families threatened Peter and John to be silent in preaching Jesus (Acts 4:1-22).

Jesus was right when He said to Peter, "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" (Matthew 16:13-20). Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Satan and the world have not prevailed against this great truth.

But, the disciples, the women who followed Jesus, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, did not have the luxury of looking ahead. They had all their eggs in one basket, in the One that they came to love. But, Jesus is now dead and their grief and mourning blinded them of their hopes and dreams. The pain of His suffering and cruel death was overwhelming. Simeon prophesied to Mary after Jesus' birth, "Behold, the Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:25-35). Mary pondered many prophecies about Jesus (Luke 2:19), but after His death I wonder how long it took her to recall them? Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy (John 16:20). Are you asking Him to roll the rock away from your stony hearts and turn your sorrow to joy?

Roll the rock away

Sunday --- Joy Unspeakable!

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 28:1-10

Mark 16:1-11

Luke 23:56-24:12

John 20:1-18

Imagine what kind of woman Mary Magdalene might have been before she was set free from the seven demons that possessed her. She was one of the devoted women that ministered to Jesus from her substances (Luke 8:13). She witnessed many of the wonderful things Jesus had done. On the cross Jesus was dripping in blood from the wounds, nails, whippings and scourging, and there she was torn to the heart and helpless (Luke 27:55-56). Jesus spoke dearly to His mother and John, cried out to the Father and gave up His spirit. Mary was there. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took Jesus down from the cross, laid Him in the tomb and sealed it with a huge rock. There Mary was, and how pitiful it must have been to see her weeping by the tomb (Matthew 27:61).

If you were there, what could you have done but weep with her. What comfort could you have given but a hug? What hope could you have given her, Jesus was dead and gone. There was no stopping the tears. Early in the morning, with little or no sleep, she was already on her way back to the tomb with Mary, the mother of James, and Salome to anoint Jesus with spices (Mark 16:1-2). The women wondered among themselves, who would roll the stone away for them. Who?

When they arrived at the tomb, the stone was moved already! What is happening? As they bowed down in amazement in fear, the angels in shining clothing in the tomb said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" And they remembered His words (Luke 24:5-8).

The women ran and told the disciples. In disbelief Peter and the other disciple ran to the empty tomb. The two of them left wondering what took place (Luke 24:11-12), but Mary Magdalene lingered longer at the tomb (John 20:11). Still weeping, she poked her head in the tomb and two angels asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'" (John 20:13-17).

They wept all night, but joy unspeakable came in the morning. We serve a living and risen Savior. He died for our sins. Like Mary, pour out your heart to Him. He is waiting. This was God's predetermined and eternal plan of salvation (Acts 2:23, Ephesians 1:3-6, Revelation 13:8). He was raised for our justification (Romans 4:23-25).

My God and your God

