

# Lest the Cross be Emptied of Its Power

*A 30-minute Meditation Booklet on MARK 14-16*

## WEEK THREE



*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 -

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

WEEK ONE	MARK 14:1-31	Prelude of the Passion
WEEK TWO	MARK 14:32-72	Arrest and Trial
WEEK THREE	MARK 15:1-25	Condemnation and Crucifixion
WEEK FOUR	MARK 15:26-16:20	Death and Resurrection

## 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 THREE : Condemnation and Crucifixion

Day One: You ought to know who I am

*Mark 15:1-5:*

*1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.*

*2 "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.  
"You have said so," Jesus replied.*

*3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."*

*5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.*

### Pastoral Sharing

The official residence of the Roman governor of the province of Judah was situated in Caesarea along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Each time the governor came to Jerusalem, he would stay in the palace of King Herod, which was also the Praetorium, located on the North Western side of the capital. It was here that the Lord Jesus received trial from Pilate, the governor at that time. The Roman empire took great pride in their Roman law which was looked upon as just and righteous. The disciples must have been eagerly awaiting the outcome of the trial, hoping that the Roman governor would give a fair trial since he did not have any personal conflicts or disputes with Jesus.

The residence of the high priest is on the South Western side of the capital. The high priest led the Sanhedrin on an overnight trial of Jesus. When morning came, they have already

made plans on the three accusations that would put Jesus to death - subverting the nation, opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king (Luke 23:2)

Since the charge had been decided, they bound Jesus and led him on foot along the streets of Jerusalem, until they came to the Praetorium of Pilate.

The most severe of the three accusations, which was also the one of great interest to the Roman governor, was Jesus' claim that he was the king, for that constituted treason against Caesar, and would beget a death penalty. Thus, the first question from Pilate to Jesus was, "Are you the king of the Jews?" If Jesus said yes, then this offence would be against Herod and the Jews, not Pilate. The Roman empire did allow the Jews to have their own systems of education, taxation, religion, and even their own king, though the king of the Jews did not have any authority to rule, and still had to submit to the sovereignty of Caesar.

Jesus replied, "You have said so."

Whether it was the Sanhedrin or the trial by the governor, the Lord kept silent towards all their false accusations. But only when asked about who he was that he responded. Why? Because it is the Father's will for everyone to know who Jesus is. Knowing Christ is the most important knowledge that can be acquired by man, because the response to this understanding determines the placement of his soul in eternity.

John 18 recorded how Jesus further revealed his identity to Pilate:

*"My kingdom is not of this world." (v36)*

*"You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (v37)*

Speaking with Pilate, Jesus' intention was not to rid the accusations against him, but to rid the sin in Pilate's soul. Regrettably, Pilate was not interested to learn more about the Truth, but hurriedly ended the conversation in sharp retort, "What is truth?" Truth was right before him, Truth was speaking to him, alas! he paid no attention to it!

How can man know Christ unless God reveals Himself to us? God's intention is for us to receive the truth in faith through hearing His words, so that we may have knowledge of the true God who saves us in this life and also in eternity. If we know how God is like, then even if we lose our job, face setbacks, suffer failures or broken relationships, we can still firmly believe that all things will come to a good ending under God's perfect saving grace:

*<sup>8</sup> Come and see what the Lord has done,  
the desolations he has brought on the earth.*

*<sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth.  
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.*

*<sup>10</sup> He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."*

*<sup>11</sup> The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

*Psalms 46:8-11*



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication





## Day Two: He suffered Under Pontius Pilate

*Mark 15:6-15*

*<sup>6</sup> Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. <sup>7</sup> A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. <sup>8</sup> The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.*

*<sup>9</sup> "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, <sup>10</sup> knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.*

*<sup>12</sup> "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.*

*<sup>13</sup> "Crucify him!" they shouted.*

*<sup>14</sup> "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.*

*But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"*

*<sup>15</sup> Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.*

## Pastoral Sharing

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate" is commonly recited from the Apostle's Creed. His name was supposed to be a mark of courage and glory, but is now synonymous with weakness and obnoxiousity.

As the administrator of the Roman law, Pilate's responsibility was to uphold justice. He was not able to find any basis to arrest Jesus according to the charges brought against him. He also knew that this was a façade for an internal power struggle within the Jewish religion, and the Jewish religious leaders were jealous of Jesus and were trying to kill Jesus with his hands. (John 18:31) Three times he affirmed Jesus' innocence:

"I find no basis for a charge against this man." (Luke 23:4)

"I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. (Luke 23:14)

"Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." (Luke 23:22)

The crowd was stirred up in rage. In simultaneous harmony, they shouted "Release Barabbas to us!" (Luke 23:19) and "Crucify him". Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd, thus he relented such that "their shouts prevailed" (Luke 23:23), and as a result, did not uphold justice to the end. The real criminal and murderer Barabbas was released, but the perfect, holy and sinless Jesus was convicted. God's righteousness was completely eradicated amidst the jealousy of the Jewish leaders, the foolishness of the impetuous crowd, and the blinded conscience of the law enforcer.

It was not that Pilate was fearful, nor ignorant, but because he wanted to satisfy the crowd for his own political interest, he willingly abandoned the crown of righteousness. When he handed Jesus over to be crucified, he was in fact handing himself over to Satan as its knife. His sin will forever be remembered by generations of God's children, and would never be erased in the record of the Book in heaven. On the Day of Judgement, "suffered under Pontius Pilate" shall once again be pronounced, and he shall receive the punishment in the lake of eternal fire along with Satan!

How dangerous the temptation for “wanting to satisfy the crowd” is! Politicians today abandon their integrity in exchange for votes, young people forsaking purity to gain acceptance by their friends, religious leaders preaching a false gospel to attract more followers ... are you also like that, always wanting to satisfy others, but sacrificing righteousness or even forfeiting your own soul?

*“Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
look at the earth beneath;  
the heavens will vanish like smoke,  
the earth will wear out like a garment  
and its inhabitants die like flies.  
But my salvation will last forever,  
my righteousness will never fail.”*

*Isaiah 51:6*

O righteous God, how easy it is for me to abandon righteousness! But far be it from you to abandon righteousness and disregard our iniquity! Thus, you have come to take our place for the punishment of sin. O Lord, grant us the courage not to satisfy others, but to boldly tread against the flow within the torrents of sin. Help us to walk in your ways and uphold righteousness. May righteousness and praise shine forth from within your church!



### Personal Reflection

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



<sup>6</sup> Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. <sup>7</sup> A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. <sup>8</sup> The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

<sup>9</sup> “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, <sup>10</sup> knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

<sup>12</sup> “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

<sup>13</sup> “Crucify him!” they shouted.

<sup>14</sup> “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

<sup>15</sup> Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

## Pastoral Sharing

At the dawn of Friday, as the first ray of sunlight beamed into the Praetorium of Herod’s palace, shouts of rage and agitation “crucify him!” shattered the serenity of the early morning, permeating through the entire city of Jerusalem. On the surface, these were the shouts of the people, yet underlying the shouts was the manipulation of the Jewish leaders, the sinister laughter of Satan, and the wisdom of God.

Before Jesus was crucified, Pilate had him flogged.

Being flogged is in no way a light punishment. They first tore the clothes off the criminal, then pinned his hands to the log above the head. The whip was made of leather, framed with lead bearings and sharp bone pieces, and one executioner stood on each side. A doctor described the aftermath of the Roman punishment of flogging:

"The weight from the lead bearings caused the sharp bones on the whip to inflict brutal cuts on Jesus' shoulders, back and feet. At first only the skin was grazed, but lashes following lashes, blood vessels rupture under the great force, and blood flowed out profusely. In the end the skin on Jesus' back pared off like strips of cloth, his whole back a gruesome sight of blood and broken flesh." (paraphrase)

O Lord, you have borne such cruel suffering for me! How should I love you?

We cannot comprehend this sudden turn of events; just a few days ago, the crowd gathered at the gates of Jerusalem because of the prophecy of Zechariah, welcoming the Lord Jesus into the city with palm branches. Though the Lord had no intention to be king, the crowd rejoiced at the coming of their king:

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*Zechariah 9:9*

How could the praises of "Hosanna" be so mercilessly replaced by "crucify him"? How could they have so easily forgotten the joy when the blind could see, the deaf could hear, the mute could sing, and the limp could walk again? Why would the people deliberately forget how the leper was cleansed by the touch of Jesus' hand, the evil spirits that came out of the demon-possessed man at his command, even the winds and the waves obeyed him, and that he raised Lazarus from the dead, causing him to walk out of the tomb alive? Did they also forget how Jesus served them tirelessly, such that the Son of man did not have a place to lay his head? And could they have also

forgotten how from the beginning they had entrusted their faith in his authority, determined to make him king and to rebuild the kingdom of Israel?

Why would they believe the false accusations against Jesus? How did their hatred of Jesus intensified to the extent they wanted to kill him? Do not the sheep listen to the voice and follow the shepherd? Alas, many of those whom had seen his power and received his blessings were not his sheep and did not belong to the shepherd!

Ah, what a frightening truth this is! Not every sheep that he had healed belonged to him. The Father causes the sun to rise on both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. By the hospitality of God, the Lord Jesus revealed his grace to all man through general revelation. Even for those who did not belong to his sheep pen, he will not refuse them!

Are you the sheep in the Lord's pen? Do you have proof that the Holy Spirit dwells within you? The proof is your life transformed by the workings of the Holy Spirit, as well as unspeakable joy that flows from the hope of resurrection. Do you have them?



### Personal Reflection

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Confession and dedication





## Day Four: The Soldiers Mocked Him

*Mark 15: 16-20*

*16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.*

### Pastoral Sharing

The violence of the cross does not consist only of the long and slow suffering process, but also the insults heaped upon the criminal, which included the mockery of the soldiers.

There were about sixty soldiers in the company, and they all came out to mock Jesus for being "the king of the Jews". First they put a purple robe on Jesus (Luke 23:11). The purple robe was a luxurious clothing, a symbol of nobility and authority. Then using a type of thorns from a plant commonly found in Palestine, they twisted into a crown and set it on Jesus. The thorns pierced into Jesus' head and blood flowed down his temples. Then they struck him on the head with a staff, such that the thorns pierced even deeper into the skin. Finally they spat on the face of the Lord.

As an act of ridicule, the soldiers fell on their knees and paid homage to Jesus. They jeered at him, saying "Hail, king of the Jews!" Little

did they know that all creatures in heaven and on earth worship this king!  
How can the worship of the true God be mocked?

*<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

*Philippians 2:10-11*

Is your heart wandering during worship on the Lord's Day? Do you ascribe all praise and honour that is due to Jesus and also offer your heart to him? If your heart is heavily laden, then come worship and praise the Lord in his holy sanctuary, and cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." (Isaiah 29:13) If your worship is superficial or just an outward obligation, then aren't you also like those soldiers? Repent quickly, my dear brothers and sisters, and may the Lord have mercy!

*<sup>7</sup> "Look, he is coming with the clouds,"  
and "every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him";  
and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him."  
So shall it be! Amen.*

*Revelation 1:7*



Personal Reflection

---

---



Confession and dedication



## Day Five: Walking on Via Dolorosa with the Lord

*Mark 15: 21-25*

*21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.*

*25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.*

### Pastoral Sharing

Golgotha is Aramaic, which means "the place of the skull", because on closer look, there seems to be a shape of a skull on that hill. We must remember "Golgotha", for this is the place where our Lord was crucified. The passage where the Lord Jesus walked from Jerusalem to Golgotha is known as "Via Dolorosa".

In the morning of that Friday, the Lord Jesus carried the cross on his shoulders, the crowd looking on as he staggered toward Golgotha with utmost pain and difficulty. Fresh blood from the Son of God stained the stones and sand along the way of suffering. O, it is Via Dolorosa that connected man and God, the earth with the heavens.

It was nine o'clock on Friday, the cross was lifted high on Golgotha, and the Lord of the heavens and the earth was hung on it! This scene fulfilled the prophecy of David:

*<sup>16</sup> Dogs surround me,  
a pack of villains encircles me;  
they pierce my hands and my feet.  
<sup>17</sup> All my bones are on display;  
people stare and gloat over me.  
<sup>18</sup> They divide my clothes among them  
and cast lots for my garment.*

*Psalm 22:16-18*

Simon of Cyrene was among the onlooking crowd, but he was chosen by the soldiers to do something that no one wanted – to carry the cross of the criminal. Little did he know that he had been chosen by God to walk the way of suffering with the Son of God, carrying the cross of all man! On this very day, Simon’s life was changed by God.

Sometime later, Simon led his wife and two sons to follow the crucified Jesus. His son became an important leader in the early church. In Paul’s letters to the Roman church, he sent them greetings and addressed Simon’s wife “who has been a mother to me, too” (Romans 16:13) We can see that Simon’s household were also intimate co-workers in the Kingdom’s business. Behold, many things viewed as unfortunate by man have become an enviable blessing in the providential hands of the sovereign God.

O Lord, thank you for choosing to love me before the creation of the world, that I may be turned away from the road to destruction. I am willing to carry my cross and walk with you on Via Dolorosa; I am willing to lead my family to work hard for the gospel and go wherever You send me!



Personal Reflection



## A Purple Robe A Crown of Thorn

*Lyrics by Timothy Dudley-Smith 1968*

*1 A purple robe, a crown of thorn,  
a reed in his right hand;  
before the soldiers' spite and scorn  
I see my Saviour stand.*

*2 He bears between the Roman guard  
the weight of all our woe;  
a stumbling figure bowed and scarred  
I see my Saviour go.*

*3 Fast to the cross's spreading span,  
high in the sunlit air,  
all the unnumbered sins of man  
I see my Saviour bear.*

*4 He hangs, by whom the world was made,  
beneath the darkened sky;  
the everlasting ransom paid,  
I see my Saviour die.*

*5 He shares on high his Father's throne,  
who once in mercy came;  
for all his love to sinners shown  
I sing my Saviour's name.*

## Vio Dolorosa

*Down the Via Dolorosa in  
Jerusalem that day  
The soldiers tried to clear the  
narrow street  
But the crowd pressed into see  
A man condemned to die on  
Calvary.*

*He was bleeding from a beating -  
there were stripes upon His back  
And He wore a crown upon his  
head  
And He bore with every step  
The scorn of those who cried out for his  
death.*

*Down the Via Dolorosa called the  
way of suffering  
Like a lamb came the Messiah  
Christ the King*

*But He chose to walk that road  
out of His love for you and me  
Down the Via Dolorosa all the  
way to Calvary.*



## Were You There When They Crucified My Lord

1 *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

2 *Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?  
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?  
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*

3 *Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?  
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?  
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?*

4 *Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?  
Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?  
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?*

## Under an Eastern Sky

*Lyrics by Albert Benjamin Simpson 1843-1919*

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.*

## I Surrender All

by Judson W. Van de Venter 1855-1939

*1. All to Jesus I surrender  
All to Him I freely give  
I will ever love and trust Him  
In His presence daily live*

*I surrender all  
I surrender all  
All to Thee my blessed Saviour  
I surrender all*

*2. All to Jesus I surrender  
Humbly at His feet I bow  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken  
Take me Jesus take me now*

*3. All to Jesus I surrender  
Make me Saviour wholly Thine  
Let me feel the Holy Spirit  
Truly know that Thou art mine*

*4. All to Jesus I surrender  
Lord I give myself to Thee  
Fill me with Thy love and power  
Let Thy blessings fall on me*

*5. All to Jesus I surrender  
Now I feel the sacred flame  
Oh the joy of full salvation  
Glory glory to His name*

