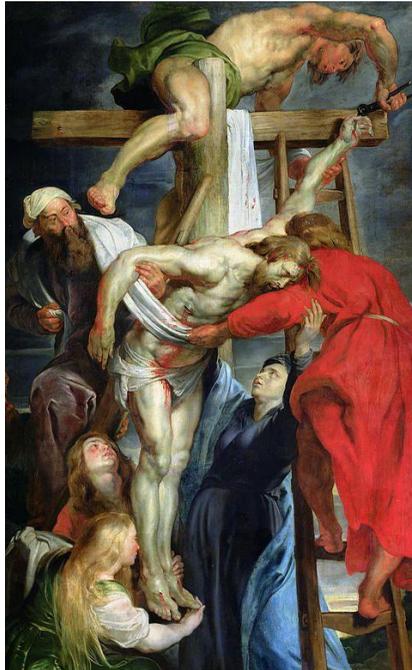


Lest the Cross be Emptied of Its Power

A 30-minute Meditation Booklet on MARK 14-16

WEEK FOUR



*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 FOUR : Death and Resurrection

Day One: That We May See And Believe

Mark 15:24-32 :

²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ^{28,29} Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Pastoral Sharing

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him, those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Today there are still many who "passed by" Jesus, they do not want to have anything to do with Christianity; many "priests and teachers of the law", they are the self-righteous religious leaders, moralists, scientists, philosophers; and also those who are wicked and "crucified with him", aren't they also mocking the Christ when they say "Let this Jesus perform a miracle, that we may see and believe." Aren't we also like them in the past, mocking the Christians in the same way, challenging the power of God with our foolish pride?

*"He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem."*

Isaiah 53:3

O How merciful God is towards me! For He did not count the debt of my transgression on me but He counted it all on Jesus!

The notice of the charge was placed at the top of the cross over the head of the criminal. Jesus' charge was written in three languages (John 19:20). The gospel of Matthew recorded the Aramaic wordings of the charge, the gospels of Mark and Luke recorded the Latin wordings, and the gospel of John Greek. This explains why the four gospels had slight variations in the description of the charge, but they all factually recorded the charge that was written and hung above the head of the Lord Jesus - *THE KING OF THE JEWS*.

But in the hearts of the Jews, the real charge was -- *he said he is the Son of God*.

Whether he is the king of the Jews, or the Son of God, the identity of the Lord Jesus had become the charge against him! Isn't this how it was in the parable of the tenants of the vineyard? The wicked tenants saw that the landlord had sent his own son, so they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." (Matthew 21:38) In the same way, the chief priests, the Pharisees and all in the Sanhedrin said to one another, "What are we accomplishing? Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him!" (John 11:47,48)

"Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

Truly, the Son of God can come down from the cross! But Jesus knew that their hearts were just like the wicked tenants, even if they saw with their own eyes, they would not believe!

O Lord, the opposition that the world has against you has not diminished today. May the Lord increase my strength to keep God's commands, not to be mesmerized nor captivated by the voices of this world, and most of all not to lose my purity out of lustful desire for the world!



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication



Day Two: Jesus Breathed His Last

Mark 15: 33-41

³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Pastoral Sharing

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Before the Lord Jesus handed his soul over to his Father God, he let out such a loud cry. This has great significance in theology and is the reason

why some theologians insisted on keeping the phrase “he descended to hell” in the Apostle’s Creed.

The pain and disgrace that was suffered by the Lord Jesus on the violent cross was inflicted by the judgement of man. But at this time, he faced much more severe judgement -- the judgement of God. The Father God turned his face away from him and the Holy Spirit left him, because he was bearing the sins of the whole world and receiving the punishment for all our sins! It was more distressing and hopeless for Christ to be turned away from God, than it was for Adam and Eve to be banished out of the garden of Eden by God. Adam and Eve could still offer sacrifices to God outside the garden of Eden, and they continued to enjoy God’s providence out of His mercy. But when Jesus bore God’s punishment for our sins, he was totally cut off from God. He could no longer see God, nor hear Him, it was as if he was completely rejected or forgotten by God. This is the death of the soul, this is the state of hell, the experience of Hades. To our Lord, being forsaken by God was more excruciating than the violence of the cross! It was this agony that led the Lord to offer up prayers in the garden of Gethsemane “with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.” (Hebrews 5:7)

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This should be our cries! In order to save us, the Lord was despised by man and forsaken by God; to save us, the Lord withstood the pain from his physical death, as well as the agony from his spiritual death! Has not God already given us this warning in the garden of Eden, “for when you eat from it you will certainly die”?

*16 And the Lord God commanded the man,
“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;
17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge
of good and evil,
for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”*

Genesis 2:16

The Lord Jesus was crucified at nine in the morning, and he gave up his spirit at three in the afternoon. He was hung for an extensive six hours on the cross. The sun was usually at its hottest between noon and three o’clock, but on this day, darkness came over the whole land. This was not a solar eclipse, but an extraordinary phenomenon that science could not explain.



Confession and dedication



Day Three: He asked boldly for Jesus' body

Mark 15:42-47

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body,

*wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock.
Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary
Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.*

Pastoral Sharing

Who will prepare the burial for the Lord Jesus? The gospels recorded that it was the two disciples who had been secretly following Jesus: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

As the sun set on Friday late afternoon, the Sabbath began. The Jews rested from all work on the Sabbath, including preparing for burials. Thus, Joseph and Nicodemus were in a hurry to place Jesus in the tomb before the sun set. They had about two hours and both of them acted in parallel: Joseph went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body, while Nicodemus prepared a mixture of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). Though they had only a little time, everything was done with utmost reverence for Jesus. This also explained why the women brought spices and perfumes at dawn on the day after the Sabbath to anoint the body of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Council, a devout man respected by the Jews and waiting for the kingdom of God. He was good and upright and had not consented to the Sanhedrin's decision and action against Jesus (Luke 23:50, 51). John 19:38 reveals that they were Jesus' followers, but did not disclose their honourable identity.

On taking the initiative to attend to the burial of Jesus, this was Joseph's first public display of his faith!

The dead body of criminals were usually disposed of hastily in public tombs. They were going to bury Jesus along with the wicked, but unexpectedly Joseph offered a new tomb for Jesus. Though God had forsaken Jesus on the cross, after Jesus had fully paid the price for our sins, God looked upon Jesus again and did not subject his body to further humiliation:

*He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

Isaiah 53:9

Joseph had to ask Pilate for Jesus' body, this meant that his secret identity would be divulged. Furthermore, everyone would come to know that the body of Jesus the criminal was laid in the new tomb of the Council member Joseph. What followed would likely be a persecution by the Sanhedrin, just like what they did to all of Jesus' other disciples.

"He went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body."

As Joseph went ahead "boldly", it was apparent that he knew full well the sacrifices and price that came with the decision. Just like you and me, he would have been fearful of the authority of the Council. But Joseph did not allow himself to be bounded by fear such that he abandoned his duty of righteousness or ignored the moving of the Holy Spirit, out of selfish consideration for his own safety. Instead, he went ahead **boldly**, and the Lord fulfilled his devotion by using him in the burial of the Lord Jesus.

Are you fearful when you are threatened in the face of death? Do you feel suffocated by the hostility of those in authority? Are you worried about the impending storms that are about to unleash in your life? When you fix your eyes on the Lord and not on the difficulty, you will be able to overcome your fears. Joseph was willing to make such a big sacrifice for the Lord when he was dead, how much more for us to do so for the Lord who is now alive!

Joseph did something he had always been afraid to do: to openly confess his faith. I believe there was not a hint of regret, but that his heart was filled with peace, especially after Jesus was resurrected. Perhaps his only regret was that he did not publicly proclaim his faith when Jesus was still alive.

Would you openly confess that Christ is your Saviour? Give thanks to God with rejoicing for your declaration!



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication



Day Four: The Empty Tomb

Mark 16:1-14

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spicesso that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

⁹ When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

¹² Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. ¹³ These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

¹⁴ Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

Pastoral Sharing

On the first day of the week, Jesus had risen, and his tomb was empty. God sent angels to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection with the women who came to look for him. Jesus' life, death and resurrection not only concerns all that is living on earth, but also all creatures who are in heaven.

The disciples were mourning and weeping. The women, though deep in their sorrows, were determined to anoint the Lord as their final offering unto him. They loved Jesus to the very end as Jesus had promised to love them to the end.

The stone at the entrance of the tomb had been rolled away. They went to the tomb but did not find the body of Jesus. The angel knew that they might have thought they came to the wrong place, so he told them: "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

The tomb of the Lord Jesus was opened not so that Jesus could come out, but that the people who came to look for him might go in, and be the witness for Jesus' empty tomb. "But go, tell his disciples and Peter..." God already foreknew and was pleased with the devotion of the women for Jesus. Thus, God blessed them to be the first persons to hear the great news of Jesus' resurrection directly from the angels, and to see for themselves with their own eyes. What great honour and joy that God has bestowed upon them!

The disciples heard the testimony of the women but they did not believe it. Afterward, two disciples also saw the resurrected Lord and reported it to the rest, but still they did not believe them. O, to be raised from the dead is what every man desire, it is also the greatest hope that God has given to man, but it is so hard for anyone to believe when it happens!

The bible recorded many events and witnesses after Christ was raised, but even till today, there are many Christians who still do not believe in the resurrection of the Christ. They gladly accept that the Lord

Jesus died for our sins and proclaim the sacrificial love of the Son of God, but see his resurrection as only a religious legend. There are also those who believe that Jesus had resurrected, but they do not believe that the children of God will also resurrect when Christ comes again. They are still mourning for the things of this present life as if they have no hope for the life that is to come. The Lord shall surely rebuke those who do not believe in the promise of the resurrection. (v14)

The Lord Jesus can be “in the world but not of the world”, because he is enthroned in heaven. He did not involve himself in a power struggle with the religious leaders, as his kingdom does not belong to his world. Only when we constantly meditate on the promise of the resurrection, we can be truly convicted of its greatness. Then we will no longer be caught in the gains and losses of this life but will store up treasures in heaven. Such is the power when we recite “I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” in the Apostle’s Creed.

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

Do you truly believe in the resurrection? Are you able to say, “I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting”? As the Lord Jesus loves us till the end, he shall surely raise our bodies on the Last Day!



Personal Reflection

whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues;¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Pastoral Sharing

This is the unchanging commission that the Lord has given to the church, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation", because in addition to the Jews, who are the chosen people of God, the Lord has also predestined to save every tribe and every race throughout the world. The gospel is Jesus Christ - he is the Word became flesh, crucified, resurrected, ascended to heaven and now lives eternally!

The disciples had to preach the gospel to their own people the Israelites, and also to the Samaritans, with whom the Jews were not willing to associate. They also had to reach out to the pagans who worshipped idols. The disciples had to step out of their comfort zone, break through the deeply seeded traditional boundaries and challenge the many lies of religiosity!

Just as the prophet Isaiah said, "Who has believed our message?" (Isaiah 53:1) the early church faced intense external opposition from three sources: the followers of Judaism, the Roman government as well as the pagan religions. Internally they were also threatened by three grave corruptions: world thoughts corroding the gospel, power struggles that destroy the church, and Satan's attack on individual believers. However, whether it was the evangelists in Jerusalem, or the missionaries who went in among the Gentiles, the Lord worked with them. Giving them the authority to heal the sick and to drive out demons, these signs confirmed Jesus' word that he is alive.

As the church continues to grow and mature, the miracles of healing and driving out demons are no longer common today. Nonetheless, the Lord Jesus is still working with all the laborers of the gospel. You and I are the miracles of this gospel. Our new lives in Christ are solid proofs that the gospel is true and has the power to save man from sin. Think about it, if every believer follows Jesus closely, hates sin, loves others, has clean hands and a pure heart, isn't this more powerful than the miracles of healing and driving out demons? Even the devil can heal the sick, but it will never ask others to do good!

Have you neglected the power of the gospel, or have you been suppressing it? When the Lord healed you and drove darkness out of your life, you too have been made a great evangelist, because that is the manifestation of the power of the Lord working with you!

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

*He appeared in the flesh,
was vindicated by the Spirit
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.*

1 Timothy 3:16

O, God in heaven working with man on earth, how beautiful and amazing is the gospel being preached! Thank you Lord Jesus, for inviting me to participate in the kingdom's work. I am willing to walk out of my comfort zone, to be an ambassador of the gospel and to serve the living Saviour. May the Lord help me and use me!



Personal Reflection



Confession and dedication

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?*

I Know that My Redeemer Liveth

Lyrics by Jessie Brown Pounds

*1 I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And on the earth again shall stand;
I know eternal life He giveth,
That grace and power are in His hand.*

Chorus:

*I know, I know that Jesus liveth,
And on the earth again shall stand;
I know, I know that life He giveth,
That grace and power are in His hand.*

*2 I know His promise never faileth,
The word He speaks, it cannot die;
Tho' cruel death my flesh assaileth,
Yet I shall see Him by and by.*

*3 I know my mansion He prepareth,
That where He is there I may be;
Oh, wondrous thought, for me He careth,
And He at last will come for me.*

It is Well with My Soul

by Horatio Gates Spafford 1828-1888

1. *When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul!"

It is well with my soul!
It is well, it is well with my soul!*

2. *Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

It is well with my soul!
It is well, it is well with my soul!*

3. *My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more;
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well with my soul!
It is well, it is well with my soul!*

4. *For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live;
If dark hours about me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

It is well with my soul!
It is well, it is well with my soul!*

