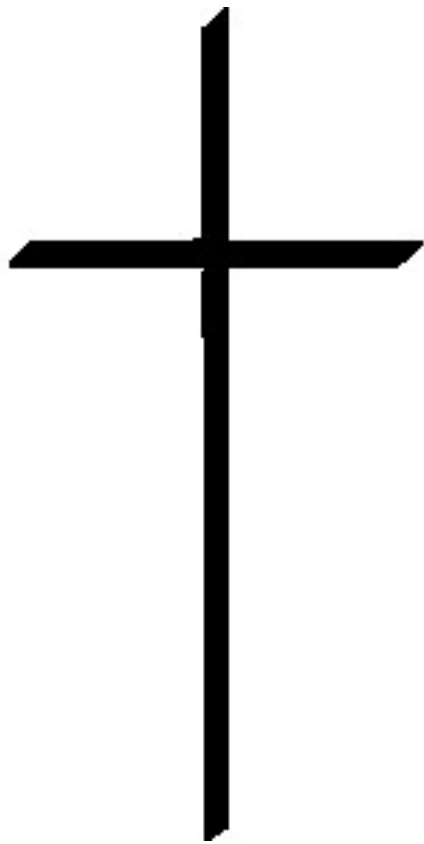


Journey to the Cross

Devotional Guides



Week Five

You may not be aware of this, but the four gospels spend an extensive amount of material specifically on the last week Jesus was alive. Here is how it breaks down in terms of each gospel:

A third of Matthew, from Matthew 21-28

A third of Mark, from Mark 11-16

A quarter of Luke, from Luke 19-24

Nearly half of John, from John 12-20

It is clear, from the sheer amount of content, that the last week of Jesus' life was of immense importance. Because He knew the cross awaited him, every action He took or word He spoke became all the more critical.

This series of devotions is called "Journey to the Cross," and is an attempt to bring into view some of the many experiences and teachings of Jesus leading up to His crucifixion on the cross. The devotions will serve in a three-fold capacity.

They will help each of us prepare our hearts for Easter. The 40 days preceding Easter have, in historical Christianity, been celebrated as the season of Lent. While the methods used to celebrate these days have varied, each Christian tradition has aimed to use this time to help Christians get spiritually ready for the good news of Easter.

They will help you get to know some church members you may not have met yet within the congregation. I asked each of our staff members to cover one week of devotions by writing one devotion themselves and by utilizing members from within their ministry sphere as the writers for each devotion. The composite of devotions intentionally covers a wide variety of members at Central. From some of our newest members, to some of our longest tenured members, from student ministry parents, to senior adults, my desire was for us to hear from parts of the congregation other than the groups we normally interact with and thus expand our understanding of how God is at work within the life of Central.

They will prepare you for the sermon each Sunday. I began the series knowing the 7 sermons I would preach beginning on February 21 and extending to April 4, Easter Sunday. From those 7 sermons I picked 6 characters, themes, or passages from the last days of Jesus that would help prepare the way for the sermon to occur on the following Sunday. As a result, if you have followed these devotions during the week, then your heart will be all the more prepared for worship each Sunday!

It has been my privilege to get to read these devotions in advance and you are in for a treat! The layout of each devotion begins with a Bible reference at the top of the page - you should read the passage first. From there, our writers have given wonderful explanations and illustrations that serve to help us know what is occurring within the text. The devotions conclude each day with some application questions that force us to do something with the truths we have just studied.

Please note, there will be a new week of devotions available to be picked up each Sunday, and we will post the devotions online so that anyone not able to come in person can still participate.

Remember, the best is yet to come!

Rob

The Arrest of Jesus

Russell Mann

Scripture:

Matthew 26:47-56

Have you ever been unjustly accused of something and wanted to defend yourself? While in college, I was pulled over by a policeman who accused me of texting while driving. I was shocked by this because I didn't even have my phone with me! I was furious with the injustice of the situation and began to angrily argue my innocence with the officer. We have all probably experienced this feeling of anger when we are treated unjustly.

In today's passage, Jesus is arrested by those accusing him of being a rebel. Peter responds to this absurd injustice like many of us would—he angrily defends his friend. Surely it cannot be God's will for the innocent Savior of the world to be taken captive and possibly killed! However, it is in this moment of violent resistance that Jesus steps in and willingly submits to his captors. Why? Go back to the garden of Gethsemane. There, while Peter was fast asleep, Jesus was busy spending time with His heavenly Father in prayer. Jesus knew from the Scriptures that as God's servant, he "must" (verse 54) suffer this injustice in order to bring salvation to the world. Since Jesus had just finished submitting himself to His Father's plan, he was now able to submit himself to his captors. He refused to defend himself against this great injustice because he knew that despite how things looked on the outside, he was at the center of God's will to die for all the injustices and sins of humanity.

Application:

1. How does prayer allow us to place unjust situations in the hands of God rather than trying to resolve them by our own power?
2. How do the Scriptures help us see God's bigger plan in the midst of difficult circumstances we face?

Jesus' Trial by the Sanhedrin

Written by Jessie Jacobs

Scripture:

Matthew 26:57-68

In this passage, we see Jesus being put on trial by a group of religious leaders—the Sanhedrin. He is questioned, accused, and mocked by a group of men who had dedicated their lives to studying scripture and leading the Jewish people. They were supposed to be leaders of their faith and yet they stood in front of the Messiah and were so blinded by their power and religion that they were unable to discern the very Savior the Scriptures told them to expect.

It's easy to condemn the Sanhedrin. How could these men not recognize Jesus, the Messiah, standing in front of them? How could they witness his miracles and see his love without realizing who He was? How could they hear him speak the very words of God and not discern his divinity?

It isn't nearly as easy to turn those questions around and apply them to our own lives. How many times do we not recognize Jesus standing in front of us? How can we witness his miracles and experience his love without realizing that He is more powerful than any circumstance? How can we read the Word of God and not be moved to action?

Sometimes, I go through life on autopilot, not spending time in prayer and not asking Jesus to guide me through my days. It is easy to rest in our knowledge of the Bible and our list of “do's and don'ts”. It is difficult to trust Jesus to be enough in every area of our lives, discern His direction, and choose to obey him even when it is uncomfortable.

Application:

1. Do you have a “heart relationship” with Jesus or just “head knowledge?”
2. In what areas of your life are you stuck on autopilot & how can you ask Jesus to be with you in those specific areas?

Lord, open our eyes to see you for who you truly are. You are enough for us in every moment of every day. Convict us of the areas in our lives where we are placing our trust in anything other than you. Thank you for the joy that comes in trusting you and following you completely.

Peter Denies Jesus

Jonathan and Melia Keenum

Scripture:

Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72;
Luke 22:55-62; John 18:16-18, 25-27

It's easy for us to read about Peter's denial of Christ and look down on him at this moment of weakness. Peter should have no reason to be afraid in this situation! He had witnessed many miracles, had heard Jesus say that he would be the rock on which He builds His church, and he had even walked on water (for a few seconds) because Peter trusted that Jesus could make it happen. Why now would Peter not only deny Christ, but swear that he does not even know Him?

Just after the Last Supper, Peter declared that he was willing to die for Jesus and that he would also never disown Him. This is a bold statement, but one that was shown false when it came time to prove his faith. Peter's focus shifted from serving Jesus to now protecting himself. His view went from an eternal one to a temporary and earthly view. This shows that while Peter thought he was ready to do anything for his Lord, he was not ready for a spiritual attack that would force him to rely on his faith in Christ.

Christians can also develop this overconfident mindset. We can say that we will never deny Christ, but when the time comes, will we be proven spiritually weak? Will we also grow fearful and deny our Lord? Any time we don't believe the Word of God, or if we revert to trying to handle things on our own, we also deny Christ.

Application:

1. Peter lost his eternal focus when faced with an earthly problem. In what areas of your life is your relationship with God vulnerable due to having a more earthly focus?
2. What are some specific areas in your life where you may be denying Christ by not trusting His Word?

To Please or Not to Please?

Written by Michelle and Yadira Roesener

Scripture:

Matthew 27:11-14; Mark 15: 1-15; Luke 23:1-7

Imagine that you're ready to give a verdict about a person that you know is innocent, but your verdict will cause the collapse of your political career. What are you going to do? Pilate, the Roman governor under Caesar, faced the same decision when Jesus was brought before him. In our story, the wicked crowd and the religious hypocrites came together to insist on accusing Jesus Christ of calling himself the Son of God and agitating multitudes to not pay taxes to Caesar. These were false charges because Jesus had said "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Mark 12:17). Pilate was terrified. The Jewish leaders told him "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." (John 19:12). Sadly, Pilate succumbed to the leader's pressure, and decided to ignore the truth. He wanted to maintain his political position. You're not Pilate, but you're a person that one day will stand before God to give an account of what you did with Jesus. It's easy to ignore that Jesus is the Savior. It's also easy to ignore the truth in order to fulfill our own desires. It's easy to succumb before a multitude of sins and attractions that this world offers. It's easy to be a religious person and check off boxes of do's and don'ts. Pilate inclined himself to his own convenience: ignore the truth, please the crowd, and waste the most important opportunity of his life—meeting Jesus in a very deep level.

Application:

1. What are you going to do with Jesus?
2. Will you be courageous enough to pay the price in every area of your life in order to follow him?
3. Who are you going to please: God or man?

The Soldiers Mock and Beat Jesus

Dave Riffe

Scripture:

Mark 15:16-20

After the scourging, the soldiers led Jesus away and called for all the soldiers to join them. They gathered around Jesus and began to mock him as King of the Jews. They dressed him like royalty with a purple robe and a crown (of thorns) and proceeded to salute Him as they would the king. Then they continued his physical punishment by hitting him with a stick over the head, driving the thorns into His head and further humiliating Jesus by spitting on him. In their final action of mockery, they bowed their knees as if to worship Him before taking him away to crucify Him.

The Jewish people turned on Jesus and required His life by crucifixion. Pilate sentenced an innocent man, Jesus, to a cruel death. God allowed His Son to go through this pain and agony. Why?? Why did all of this happen to Him? Because it was God's plan to save mankind. Since the Garden of Eden, man has needed salvation. Initially, it was the shedding of the blood of animals. But salvation required the ultimate sacrifice, the perfect Lamb of God--Jesus. And God used the Jewish people; Pilate, and soldiers to carry out His plan for mankind.

While we gasp at what Jesus went through and can't believe how the soldiers treated Him, are we any different than the soldiers? The soldiers scourged and mocked Jesus and Jesus died for them. We mock Jesus through the sin in our lives and Jesus died for us. Jesus shed His blood to cover the sins of the world—past, present, and future.

Application:

1. How have you mocked Jesus with the way you live your life?
2. What changes will you make in your life to ensure Jesus is glorified, not mocked, in your life?

What Do You Think It Was Like to Carry the Cross of the One Who Died for You?

Leah Archer

Scripture:

Mark 15:21, Matthew 27:32, and Luke 23:26

Three of the Gospels all give the account of Simon of Cyrene, a passerby coming in from the country, who was compelled by the Romans to carry the cross of Jesus. He was a man clearly identified by name, region, and family in the Bible.

Many Bible commentaries believe that Simon was a displaced Jew from Cyrene coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. No one knows why Simon was there at that moment. Was he one of the “secret followers of Christ”, observing out of curiosity or simply passing by? No matter the reason, Simon was chosen to be Jesus’ last helper.

Jesus had spoken to His disciples earlier and told them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24). Jesus humbled himself as a man and was beaten and bruised on his path to crucifixion. Simon carrying the cross behind Jesus is a beautiful and painful picture of our calling as believers.

Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him, a command so vividly portrayed by Simon of Cyrene. With this command comes a promise, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.” (Matthew 16:25) This is our promise of Easter- the new life that is found when we take up our cross and follow our risen Savior!

Application:

1. Jesus commands us to “take up our cross and follow Him.” What is your cross that you need to take up to follow Him?
2. Simon was forced into service by the Romans, but he was also called by God to serve Jesus. How is God calling you to serve Him?



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