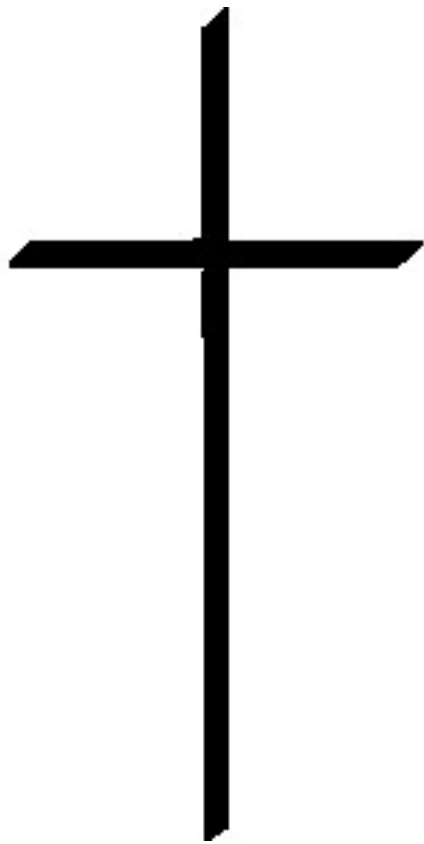


Journey to the Cross

Devotional Guides



Week Four

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!

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Jesus Predicts His Betrayal and Death

By Grace Braddock

Scripture:

Matthew 26:1-2

Jesus had told his disciples many times that He would be betrayed, arrested, tortured, and killed. In these verses, He even gives them a specific time that it would happen. He was describing the fulfillment of numerous prophecies of the Messiah from the Old Testament. However, the disciples still didn't understand that Jesus himself is the Passover Lamb. Although they believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, they still didn't comprehend that He wasn't there to free them from the oppressive Roman government and establish His reign on earth.

Jesus must have had a reason for predicting his death so many times to his followers. He knew that they wouldn't understand until after He had died but still made a point to emphasize it to them. I believe that one reason He continued to repeat the prediction of His death was because He knew that the disciples would remember it after He died. When Jesus died, His followers were devastated and confused because the One they believed was going to save them had been murdered by the ones they thought Jesus was going to free them from. However, the disciples could look back and recall the times He predicted His death and the following resurrection and put their hope in a Messiah who was more powerful than Death, so certainly more powerful than the Romans.

In order for the disciples to put their faith in Jesus as He was, He had to completely ruin their idea of what they thought they needed in a Messiah. God's plan was to save the people from their sin so that they could live with Him forever in Heaven. His followers' failure to understand was all part of God's eternal plan to save everyone.

Application:

1. What is something in your past that you didn't understand at the time but now can see how God was using it for His glory?
2. Today, how can you live with the attitude that God is working in your life even in the things that seem impossible or that you don't fully understand?

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

By Jacob Glenn

Scripture:

John 14:15-27

Throughout our everyday lives, there is always a constant temptation to do the wrong things that Satan tries to get us to do. Many times, we may find ourselves having to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us out of those bad situations that the devil has tried to trap us in. I have not had a lot of experiences to look back on, but I can still remember times when I could feel the Holy Spirit working in my life. As I have gotten older and have gone through middle school and high school, some of the friends that I had in middle school are no longer my friends today because I knew that the Holy Spirit was leading me to the friends that would be good influences and good examples for me to be around. I also hope to be an example to them by being more like Christ every single day.

While explaining the Holy Spirit to his disciples, Jesus says “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (v, 23). Jesus here is talking about how the Holy Spirit is able to live in us. He says that if we love him, we will show our love for him by keeping his commandments, and later says that those who do not love him will not keep his word. That they will not have the Holy Spirit within them. All of this, Jesus said, comes right from the Father. As Jesus leaves the world, he is not leaving us without God. God promises us the Holy Spirit will be with us always to help lead us to be more like him.

Application:

1. How do you see the Holy Spirit working through your everyday life?
2. How can you be more like Jesus through the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

The Work of the Holy Spirit

By Bryan Blass

Scripture:

John 16:5-15

While we read yesterday about the promise of the Holy Spirit, we are able to see in today's Scripture passage more about the "*work of the Holy Spirit*." As Jesus again mentions His approaching departure, none has asked, "*Where are You going?*" The Lord had certainly not forgotten that Peter and Thomas had asked some questions about His departure, but they had not asked where He was going in the sense meant here. This is because they were most concerned about their immediate loss and the desperation felt in their souls with His departure. They acted much like we would as they felt a sense of emptiness, unable to look past their own sorrow.

Jesus Christ was quick to demonstrate compassion as the Great Shepherd who knew that the hearts of His followers were both broken and scared. He was preparing them for the descent of the Holy Spirit, as noted in John 16:7-11. Jesus teaches in John 15:26 that the Holy Spirit is a person distinct from the Father and Son. This verse indicates that the Holy Spirit goes out from the Father and testifies about Jesus – we see the Triune (three-in-one) God at work.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to carry out the purposes of God. He convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He leads us into all truth as He teaches and instructs. It is the Holy Spirit who produces fruit in our lives and spurs us on in service as we utilize our gifts and abilities.

Many things that we do every single day require some degree of transformation. Food items are transformed to make a tasty meal. Rough wood is transformed to make a beautiful piece of furniture. Clay is molded to make a pot or sculpture. In like manner, we as followers of Jesus Christ are in need of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Robertson McQuilkin, author of *Life in the Spirit* wrote the following, "*When God wants to act in our lives, He acts by His Spirit. The infinite God wants to relate to us personally to transform us into the likeness of Christ Himself. He transforms us through the work of His Spirit.*"

Application:

1. Knowing that God desires to work through His Holy Spirit in your life, are you open to His work? Are you allowing His work to transform you more into the image of Jesus?
2. While the Holy Spirit is active in some areas of your life, would you be willing to admit to Him that there are some other areas where you have resisted His work? As He wants the Father's best for you, would you be willing this day to allow Him full access?

Jesus washing the feet of His disciples

By Tracey Lindquist and Emery Tompkins

Scripture:

John 13:1-13

Have you ever washed anyone's feet? Or how about this, have you ever helped put shoes on someone's feet? Let's get low for a moment, shall we?

The hour has come when Jesus must leave this world and go to the Father. He is having supper with his disciples. He is reflecting on his love for them, even while the devil is at work at one of his disciple's hearts. There is still something to share with them, something to teach, an example to show.

He washes their feet. The creator of feet has stooped low to touch the very feet he has designed. He is taking on a task which is given to a servant. He knows everything. He also knows their hearts and their thoughts, and He knows they don't understand.

Loving is serving. My son loves for me to pamper his feet. He feels loved and I, in turn, love that. It gives a moment similar to this, bent low before someone we love, taking care of them, being his mother and teacher. I'm allowed this sweet moment with my son, taking care of him, as my heart prays for him.

Jesus is Lord and Teacher. In these final hours He is loving and serving. He shows us an example of how to serve others: Others who love us, hurt us, argue with us, don't understand us. You can fill in the blank with your own type of person, but they still need love and service. To be a part of what He is doing we need to humble ourselves, and care for others. Follow the example set for us. And it's okay if you don't understand in the moment,... later you will.

Application:

Who is someone you can love and serve?

Initiating the Lord's Supper

By Wiley and Wendi Hill

Scripture:

Luke 22: 13-22

Just before Jesus was about to be arrested, put on trial, and crucified, He took a moment while in the upper room with His disciples to establish an important reminder. There was little time left for Jesus to give more instructions about what was coming or what would be required of His disciples. Yet with the few moments He had left with the disciples, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. For Jesus to spend one of His last moments on the earth establishing this memorial ought to cause us to realize the significance of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus had arranged to eat the Passover meal with His disciples. When the meal was finished Jesus took the bread and the wine and He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." The breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine should prompt us to recall that Christ was broken on the cross for us. The bread and wine visibly depict the broken body and shed blood of Christ Jesus and help us remember His death and reminds of what happened on Calvary. Therefore, we do this in remembrance of what He did for us, when He died for us; and for a memorial of what we do, in joining ourselves to Him in an everlasting covenant.

The Lord's Supper is a symbol of the new covenant we have with God by Christ Jesus. This covenant is the "new and living way" whereby we follow God's law written on our hearts by the power of His Spirit. Observing the Lord's Supper carries personal significance because Jesus calls us to remember that He gave His body "for you." It also carries personal responsibility for us to participate with reverence, humility, and sincerity, understanding and proclaiming Christ's great act of love.

Application:

1. Why is the Lord's Supper important for us to observe on a regular basis?
2. When we participate in the Lord's Supper do we truly honor what the symbols of the bread and wine represent?
3. What should be going on in our hearts and minds as we partake of the Lord's Supper?

They go out Singing Hallel Psalms

By Fred Bueto

Scripture:

Mark 14:26; Matthew 26:30; Psalm 113-118

Easter celebrations include powerful praise songs about Jesus' death and resurrection. The Jewish Passover also has songs sung each year called the Hallel (Hebrew for *praise*). These are found in Psalms 113-118. The theme of the Hallel is how the Lord saves, restores and blesses his people. As Jesus concluded the Passover meal with his disciples the scriptures tell us they ended with a song of praise. According to the Passover tradition, it was likely one of these six Hallel songs.

Have you ever been singing in church when all of a sudden, the words seem to leap off the page (or screen), and every phrase feels like it was meant just for you, and the situation you are in? When that happens, the song has an even deeper, personal meaning. It's a special moment between you and the Lord.

As you read the Hallel Psalms, imagine Jesus singing with the Disciples. If you were Jesus, how would the following verses strike you at the conclusion of the Passover meal?

Psalm 116 ¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants.

There must have been a tremble in Jesus' voice as he sang. What a connection there is between this Hallel and what he is experiencing at that moment! Jesus had just initiated the Lord's Supper, lifting up a cup (Ps. 116:13) to tell his disciples "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," (Mark 14:24). He is about to fulfill a vow (Ps. 116:14) in front of many onlookers. He would bear our sins on the cross of Calvary. His Father, the Lord, would look on (Ps. 116:15).

The Hallel songs were very personal to Jesus, and now they are very personal to us, for it is for us that He came. When we lift up praises this Easter let's do it as people who are part of the song, part of His story.

Application:

What is one of your favorite Easter songs? Why? Sing a verse.

Thank Jesus for fulfilling his vow so that you may be saved, restored, and blessed.



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