

Jesus: One Week's Journey - Glory to Grave

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One week in April, A.D. 30 was in many ways the most important week in the entire history of the world. It was the final drama of Jesus' ministry on earth as he came to Jerusalem in a time of great hope and danger. He confronted the powerful religious and political authorities of his day, and they put him to death by crucifixion, but God raised him from the dead. The events of this week are always central to the story of our faith.

≅ *Sunday (April, A.D. 30)* ≅

Jesus, the Humble King, arrives at Jerusalem.

Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-19

On the Sunday before the Passover, Jesus was ready to enter Jerusalem, conscious of the intense opposition he would face, but ready for the final confrontation. Surrounded by Passover pilgrims, Jesus decided to enact Zechariah's prophecy of the triumphant but humble king who comes to Zion riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9).

Jesus sent two disciples to bring a donkey colt. A crowd fired with prophetic expectations and Messianic hopes at this time of the great feast was flowing into Jerusalem. They recognized the sign of the coming of a king and carpeted the road with their garments. While waving leafy branches and palm fronds as a symbol of anticipated victory, they raised the cry, "*Hosanna!*" (meaning "*Lord, save us!*"). "*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*"

When Jesus came in sight of Jerusalem—a spreading, golden city, with its exquisite Temple sparkling with gold—he wept thinking of the disaster that would befall it. At evening, Jesus left Jerusalem and spent the night in the town of Bethany, about two miles away.

What does it mean for Jesus to come into your life as Lord and King? What does it mean for your Lord and King to be one who comes with humility in order to serve others?

≅ *Monday* ≅

Jesus, the Prophet, challenges the Temple authorities by cleansing the Temple.

Mark 11:12-19; Matthew 21:10-22; Luke 19:45-46

On Monday morning, as he left Bethany for the Temple, Jesus performed an act symbolic of what was to come that day. He saw a seemingly healthy fig tree, full of leaves, but the tree had born no fruit. Jesus cursed its deadness in the midst of a show of life.

Jesus returned to the Temple courts which were busy with commerce for the Passover crowds, the buying and selling of sacrificial animals, and money-changing for temple taxes. Jesus was outraged at how God's house, a place that was intended to symbolize God's presence among his people, had been corrupted by the aristocratic, Roman-appointed high priests. He saw that the Temple had become not a sanctuary for people genuinely to meet God but a space devoted to vast markets for lucrative commerce. The place was filled with the bustle of apparent life but was missing the central purpose for which it existed.

Like prophets of old, Jesus cried out against the priests' abuses. He also dramatized his words by overturning the tables of money changers and even driving those who are buying and selling out of the Temple courts. His actions caused an uproar as some were angered by the disruption of business and others were astonished at Jesus' bold public confrontation of the authorities. Jesus drove his point home by shouting words from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah: "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations*" (Isa. 56:7). "*But you have made it a den of robbers*" (Jer. 7:11).

Jesus' action, of course, especially angered the Temple authorities, who saw their worst fears about Jesus fulfilled and began seeking a way to rid themselves of this troublemaker. But the growing Passover crowds made them cautious. The people were astonished by Jesus and listened intently to his teachings. On Monday evening he returned to Bethany for the night. The fig tree had withered.

Have you ever experienced religion that seemed outwardly very alive but had lost its deeper commitment and meaning? Have you ever felt that way about your own faith?

≅ Tuesday ≅

Jesus, the Teacher, answers every question.

Mark 11:20 – 13:37; Matthew 21:23 – 25:46; Luke 20:1 – 21:38;
John 12:20-50

When Jesus entered the Temple on Tuesday morning, the priestly authorities began trying to undermine Jesus by publicly demanding proof of his prophetic authority. Jesus, however, refused their demand by showing that they were unwilling to recognize God's work even in John the Baptist, whom the people knew to be a prophet from God. Through parables Jesus showed that the authorities were alienated from God and opposed to God's purposes. *"Truly I tell you,"* Jesus warned, *"the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you"* (Mt. 21:31).

Throughout the day in the Temple, Jesus answered challenging questions brought by various groups who opposed him. Pharisees and partisans of Herod tried to get him to make treasonous statements against paying taxes to Caesar. The Sadducees asked a question that they thought made the idea of the resurrection of the dead look ridiculous, but Jesus showed that they simply did not know God's power and nature.

When one teacher of the Law asked what God's most important commandment was, Jesus unhesitatingly said that the first command was for a passionate love of God with *"all your heart and soul and mind and strength."* Alongside it was a second – to *"love your neighbor as yourself."*

He challenged the rigorous piety of the Pharisees that often made an outward appearance of devotion to God while leaving the heart unchanged. At the same time he praised an impoverished widow who trusted God with her whole life.

When some Greeks came to talk to Jesus in the Temple, their presence symbolized for Jesus that the moment for the universal proclamation of his message, which could take place only after his

death, had arrived. “*And I,*” Jesus said, “*when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself*” (Jn. 12:32).

As Jesus left the Temple for the last time, he sat with his disciples on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem and predicted the destruction of the great edifice. He told of the sufferings that would face his disciples and of the woes of the last days. Through parables, he warned his disciples to live expectantly, watching for his return like a bridal party awaiting the bridegroom or diligent servants expecting the return of their master. He challenged them to use the opportunities of their lives boldly like managers investing large sums for their employer.

Jesus portrayed his final royal judgment of all nations as like a shepherd separating sheep from goats to his right and left. Everyone is judged by the same standard, whether they have cared for the King when he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison. No one being judged knew when they had ever seen the king in such need. Jesus said that when they had helped the most seemingly unimportant person in need, they were serving him.

How do you allow Jesus’ teachings to challenge and guide your everyday life? How do you show a passionate love for God in your life? Where have you seen Jesus hungry, thirsty, a stranger in need?

≅ *Wednesday* ≅

Jesus, the Betrayed, is anointed.

Mark 14:1-11; Matthew 26:1-16; Luke 22:1-6; John 12:1-8

On Wednesday, Jesus remained in Bethany. Back in Jerusalem, the chief priests were making plans to arrest Jesus, but they wanted to capture him alone, because they were afraid the crowds might riot.

On Wednesday afternoon Jesus went to a meal in the house of Simon, a leper whom Jesus had healed. Tension and uncertainty is high among the disciples as they have watched their high hopes of a glorious kingdom fade and have seen Jesus’ predictions that he would be rejected and killed become an ever greater likelihood.

During the meal a woman entered the room with an alabaster flask, broke its seal, and poured a fragrant oil called nard over Jesus’ head. She said not a word, but her action incited an argument among

some of the disciples, protesting that such expensive perfume should have been sold and given to the poor. Jesus, however, defended the woman's actions as a prophetic act of service, "*a beautiful deed.*" "*She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial,*" he said with ominous praise. Jesus promised that wherever his own story is told, "*what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.*"

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve who had become wholly disenchanted with Jesus went to Jerusalem and met with the leading priests to arrange to help them arrest Jesus. Judas' motivations are not fully known, but he may well have become angry and disillusioned when he realized that Jesus did not at all intend to fulfill his hopes for a Messiah-King who would cast out foreigners and restore Israel's glory.

The priests agreed to pay him 30 pieces of silver, the amount set in the ancient Law to pay for a slave, and Judas began to look for an opportunity to have Jesus arrested away from the crowds.

What is a beautiful act of service that you could do for someone to show your love for Jesus? Do you ever feel disappointed or disillusioned that God does not fulfill your expectations in the way you thought he would?

≅ *Thursday* ≅

Jesus, the Servant Master, shares the Passover.

Mark 14:12-42; Matthew 26:17-46; Luke 22:7-46; John 13:1 – 18:1

On Thursday morning Jesus sent two disciples into Jerusalem to prepare a room for the Passover meal that they would celebrate that evening.

At sundown as Passover began, Jesus walked from Bethany to the upper room in Jerusalem to share what he was sure would be his last meal with the twelve.

Jesus was filled with love for the disciples and wanted to show them in an unforgettable way what it meant for him to be their Master. At the beginning of the supper, he took a basin of water, and, like a servant, began to wash the disciples' feet.

Peter could not accept what Jesus was doing. It seemed wrong that his master would act like his servant, and he vehemently refused to have his feet washed. Jesus insisted, however, that unless Peter could accept Jesus' service, he could have no part in Jesus.

Jesus urged them all to see the deep meaning of his action. They must serve others as he, their master and teacher, had served them.

Jesus astounded the group by solemnly announcing, *“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”* The disciples were filled with sorrow, consternation, and self-doubt. In a cryptic fashion, Jesus pointed to Judas Iscariot, but the other disciples did not understand his meaning. Jesus also warned Peter that even he would deny that he knew Jesus. Peter vociferously promised that he would never deny Jesus, as did all the other disciples.

During the meal, Jesus took some of the bread and blessed it, broke it, and said, *“Take; this is my body”* (Mk. 14:22). He also held up a cup of wine, gave thanks, and passed it among them for all to drink. His words pierced them as he said, *“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many”* (Mk. 14:24). In the events that were about to take place, Jesus’ disciples would share Jesus’ fate and the life that he would give.

Jesus talked at length with his disciples, calling them to *“a new commandment, that you love one another ... just as I have loved you”* (Jn. 13:34). He assured them that though he must go away from them, he would send them the Holy Spirit. *“My peace I give to you,”* Jesus said, *“in the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world”* (Jn. 16:33). Jesus prayed that his disciples may always be one with him and the Father, *“so that the world may believe that you have sent me”* (Jn. 17:21).

Jesus led the disciples to a grove on the Mount of Olives called Gethsemane. Jesus becomes more and more agitated. *“I am deeply grieved, even to death,”* he told Peter, James, and John. Jesus saw his coming death as the approach of a bitter enemy. He prayed, *“Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”*

The disciples had fallen asleep, but Jesus struggled on alone, finding through his prayer the strength to embrace the will of God. Jesus would drink the cup, taking on himself the sins of the whole world including our sins.

Do you ever find that you overestimate your strength in the face of difficult situations? How do you experience the peace that Jesus gives you in a troubled world?

≅ Friday ≅

Jesus, the Crucified, suffers for us.

Mark 14:43 – 15:47; Matthew 26:47 – 27:61; Luke 22:47 – 23:55;
John 18:2 – 19:42

As midnight passed, a crowd armed with swords and clubs approached – with Judas Iscariot in the lead. Judas kissed him in greeting, and the crowd immediately seized Jesus. Peter started to defend Jesus with his sword, but Jesus stopped him. The disciples all fled while Jesus was led away under arrest.

During the night, Jesus underwent an interrogation or trial before the corrupt high priest Caiaphas. No charges could be found until the high priest asked Jesus directly, “*Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?*” Jesus answers, “*I am.*” The high priest took that statement as blasphemy and was ready to hand Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, for trial.

While Jesus confessed who he was before the high priest and was condemned, Peter was outside in the courtyard. There, a slave girl challenged him, his courage failed, and he denied that he knew Jesus.

Jesus was taken before Pilate, charged with claiming to be a king, thus a traitor to the Roman emperor. Pilate, a man who despised the Jews, hardly took the charge seriously. He asked Jesus contemptuously, “*Are you the King of the Jews?*” Jesus responded, “*You say so,*” but refused to answer any more charges (Mk. 15:2).

Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who was in Jerusalem for the feast, but Jesus refused to say a word in answer to his mockery. Pilate tried to use Jesus’ known popularity with the crowds to get the people to condemn Barabbas, an insurrectionist against Rome. But the people chose Barabbas, and Jesus was condemned to be crucified.

Jesus was flogged mercilessly, mocked, crowned with thorns, led out to a place called “*the Skull,*” stripped, nailed to a cross, and crucified between two criminals. He prayed for God to forgive his tormentors. Amid cries of derision and agony, Jesus spoke tenderly to his mother and even offered hope to one of those crucified with him.

At noon, darkness descended on the land. As the horror of death for the Son of God neared, Jesus cried out in the words of an ancient Psalm, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mk. 15:34). No one could imagine the inner agony that Jesus knew.

But as Jesus died, a centurion standing at the cross confessed in amazement, “*Truly this was the Son of God*” (Mk. 15:39).

As the beginning of the Sabbath approached, Joseph of Arimathea gained permission from Pilate to take Jesus’ body, and he laid it in a new rock-hewn tomb.

*In what sense were you there when Jesus was crucified?
Where were you? With the crowds? With Peter? With Pilate?
With Jesus? How has this story become a central event in your own life?*

≡ *Saturday* ≡

Jesus, Lord of Life, lies in the bonds of death.

Matthew 27:62-66; Luke 23:56

On the Sabbath, the Temple authorities stationed guards at the tomb to prevent the theft of Jesus’ body. Jesus’ disciples kept the Sabbath rest but were filled with grief and uncertainty. Many felt deep disappointment because the hopes they had for Jesus had not been fulfilled. No one knew just what their future held or *what would happen next...*

Do you find yourself waiting in disappointment and uncertainty in life? What are you waiting for?

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, ... he was wounded for our transgressions, ... and with his stripes, we are healed.” *Isaiah 53:4-5*