

THE LAST DAYS OF JESUS

*Eight readings through the death
and resurrection of Jesus*

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The events of Easter are among the most important in the Christian faith—the death and resurrection of Jesus! To help you prepare to celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death, we've created this devotional: *The last days of Jesus: eight readings through the death and resurrection of Jesus.*

As a Christ-centred ministry, we want to encourage your faith. We pray daily readings will be a blessing to you and your family as you prepare your hearts to celebrate the good news of Easter.

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Sunday

THE
TRIUMPHANT
KING

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

*"Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"*

His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

JOHN 12:12-19

There is profound irony in Jesus' triumphal entry.

In a scene straight out of Zechariah's prophecy, the people's King had come, righteous and bringing salvation with Him, to the rejoicing of the people [Zechariah 9:9]. They waved palm branches while crying out, "Hosanna"—"Oh save!"

Of course, the people spoke better than they realized.

During the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel was the most powerful nation in the region. Now, they were a marginalized people, weak and powerless under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire. Over the years, there had been many self-proclaimed saviours who'd attempted to liberate the nation from Roman rule by force. They'd garnered a following, but all wound up dead.

But Jesus was different. He came performing signs and wonders—even raising the dead to life! He preached with authority, not like the other religious leaders [Matthew 7:28-29]. He proclaimed peace with God and the forgiveness of sins, welcoming the marginalized and the outcast into His company. This could only be the Messiah, the promised Son of David who would bring glory back to Israel.

The people were right, and yet so, so wrong. Jesus was their Messiah, this was true. He was their King. But they couldn't see past their immediate circumstances. They expected a warrior who would bring their oppressors to their knees. Instead, they found a Messiah who was humble in spirit and a servant of all.

This is the great irony of the triumphal entry: the problem was not Jesus. It was their expectations. Their “Jesus” was too small, but they couldn’t see it. Jesus had a greater enemy in His sights than Caesar and his empire. He was coming not to liberate His people from a man-made empire, but from their—and our—captivity to a greater power: sin. All of human history was building to this moment, the moment when Jesus would drink from the cup of God’s wrath [Matthew 26:39] and rescue His people from bondage to sin and death.

And so those same people who cried, “Hosanna!” on Sunday would be calling out for Jesus’ blood on Friday—so He could defeat their greatest foe.



PRAYER

Father, we are grateful you don't exist to meet our expectations, and that your plans are so much better than what we can imagine. Thank you that Jesus didn't come to defeat a mere human leader, but our greatest enemy. Turn our hearts away from ideas about you that are too small. Prepare our hearts to celebrate your victory this week, Lord. Amen.

Monday

THE
PURIFYING
LORD

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them,

*"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called
a house of prayer for all the nations'?
But you have made it a den of robbers."*

And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city.

MARK 11:12-19

Jesus' days leading up to the crucifixion were pregnant with meaning. Consider the cursing of the fig tree. Most of us have read this and been confused—why did Jesus react so strongly to the fruitless fig tree? Did He wake up on the wrong side of the bed? Was he suffering from low blood sugar? But Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is only understood when read in light of what happens next in Mark's gospel—His cleansing of the Temple.

What Jesus did figuratively with the fig tree, He did literally to the Temple. This was meant to be a place where the fruit of true worship could be seen. It was to be a house of prayer [Isaiah 56:7] to draw people from all the nations to see the glory and goodness of the Lord. Instead, it had been perverted into a house of commerce, one where man's greed could be seen but God's glory was hidden.

When Jesus came to the Temple this day, it was not as a pilgrim preparing for the Passover—it was as the sovereign King, passing judgment on the fruitless Temple and its works. Fruitless religious behaviour would end. Like the fig tree, it would wither and die [Mark 11:20]. The tables were overturned. The moneychangers were run out. The religious leaders were condemned.

The Lord's house and the Lord's people would be purified. But rather than be purified themselves—rather than submitting to their king—the religious leaders determined to destroy the Purifier.



PRAYER

Father, the warning in the fig tree is clear: the outward appearance of spiritual health isn't enough—we are to be people who bear fruit at all times. Cleanse our hearts, purify us, rid us of our sinful thoughts and motives, Lord. Allow us to show your glory to the world and bring honour to the name of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday

THE
UNCHALLENGEABLE
AUTHORITY

And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them,

"I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me."

And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'From man?'"—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

MARK 11:27-33

The conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders is not unlike many in our day. We see it time and again: Jesus could not have been God; he was merely a “good teacher.” But when challenged, most opponents can do little more than shrug in frustration and say, “I don’t know.”

Jesus would not allow the priests and scribes this luxury.

They had seen the signs He’d performed. They’d heard His powerful teaching. They’d witnessed Him tossing the moneychangers out of the Temple... And they wanted to know: on whose authority was He doing these things? Jesus was not a priest nor a recognized authority on the Scriptures according to their standards. He was the son of a carpenter from an unimportant town in an inconsequential province.

And yet, somehow, He was turning the world upside down.

And so they spoke up. “By what authority do you do these things?” they asked, with that barely concealed frustration you see when someone’s desperately trying to keep their cool. But Jesus knew their hearts better than even they did. He knew they weren’t sincere and so he backed them into a corner. If they answered His question, He’d answer theirs.

“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”

Immediately, they saw the trap they’d walked in to. If they said John’s ministry was from God, Jesus would rebuke them for not believing his words. If they said it was from man, the crowd would lynch them, for they knew he was a prophet.

So they answered, "I don't know."

And so their ignorance and lack of sincerity stood revealed for all to see. But Jesus had no time for such things. He would not entertain their ignorance. They could not challenge what they did not know. They could not take away what was not theirs to give. And, they would learn, they could not even take His life unless He first gave it.



PRAYER

Father, we live in a time when so many challenge the authority of Jesus. They question Him, they reinterpret Him, they deny Him... Even in our own lives, we struggle to acknowledge His authority and submit to Him. Help us not to question Him out of ignorance or out of a lack of sincerity. Help us to honour and obey Him in all things, for our good and your glory. Amen.

Wednesday

THE
DELIVERED
DELIVERER

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples,

*“You know that after two days
the Passover is coming, and
the Son of Man will be
delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said,
“Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”*

MATTHEW 26:1-5

Although they'd tried, the priests and scribes could not challenge Jesus' authority. They couldn't discredit Him. So there was only one thing to do: kill Him. But Jesus had a massive following—He was a hero among the people of Judea who were convinced He was the prophet Moses spoke of (Deuteronomy 18:15). Any action they took would be met with an uproar. The people would riot if Jesus were arrested during the Passover. If the priests were serious about their plan, they'd have to do it in secret.

But their plan wasn't only theirs. It was Jesus', too. In fact, it was He who, from eternity past, determined with the Father that this plan would come to pass. All the events that would occur were according to "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). This is why He could say to His disciples that in two days, He would "be delivered up to be crucified."

He knew all the circumstances surrounding what would happen because, even as Caiaphas and the elders were making their plans, the plan belonged to Jesus. Jesus would be delivered over to them. He would be crucified. But He was being delivered up in order to be the Deliverer of His people.



PRAYER

Father, it's hard for us to understand how human plans and Your plans work together, but we know from your Word that they do. Thank You that from before time began, You, the Son and the Holy Spirit planned to deliver Your people from their bondage to sin. You intended the plan of the elders, one meant for evil, to be used for good. Help us to see how You continue to work in this way even today, using the plans of men so You would be glorified and Your people would be saved. Amen.

Thursday

THE
SUBMISSIVE
SAVIOUR

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed,

*"My Father, if this cannot pass unless
I drink it, your will be done."*

And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

MATTHEW 26:36-46

When we think of Jesus, we often think of Him as sure, strong and confident—the paragon of unwavering faith in the Father. It’s hard for us to wrap our minds around the idea of Jesus being terrified. And yet, this is what we see on the night before the crucifixion.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, mere hours before He would be betrayed by Judas and led away to His death, Jesus experienced fear in a way He never had before. The full, unrestrained fury of God’s wrath against sin was about to be poured out on Him. He would endure all the punishment due for the sins of His people. So overwhelmed was He that Jesus began to sweat what appeared to be drops of blood! To say Jesus was terrified is a massive understatement. And so He asked the most important question anyone could ask: Is there another way?

How many of us have wondered this? After all, throughout the gospels, Jesus performed amazing signs and wonders—He even forgave sins with just a word. Did Jesus have to endure such torture? Wasn’t this kind of excessive? While this is difficult for us to understand, we need to take comfort in Jesus’ prayer:

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

Jesus asked the Father if there was another way. How did the Father answer? He said no. The only way to rescue His people from sin was for Jesus to die. And Jesus responded by submitting to the Father’s will. By doing so, Jesus’ resolve was strengthened. His terror subsided. He stood, ready to face His betrayer, the submissive Saviour, ready to die for the sins of the world.



PRAYER

Father, thank you for this picture of Jesus' humanity—that He truly was a man, even as He was truly God. Help us to make His prayer ours, that we would be encouraged and strengthened as we submit our wills to Yours', knowing that Your plans are far greater than anything we can imagine. Amen.

Friday

THE
DESPISED BUT
UNDEFEATED
KING

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice,

*“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”
which means, “My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?”*

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.” And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

MARK 15:33-39

After hours of mock trials, brutal torture, having been made to carry His own cross to the place of His crucifixion and finally having spikes driven through His hands and feet, Jesus' work was nearly done. Darkness covered the land and a cry came from Jesus, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

From the cross, as Jesus quoted the first verse of Psalm 22, we're left to wonder what was happening in that moment. What was happening between the Father and the Son, no one can say. But as Jesus cried out, intentionally quoting this psalm of David, we gain a better picture—for in all its details, this psalm is about Jesus.

Perhaps, it was a final reminder to the people that all that was occurring was happening according to the Scriptures. He was scorned by man; He was despised by His people. He was mocked, just as the psalmist said He would be [Psalm 22:6-8].

"He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" [Luke 23:35]

And when He breathed His last, and as the temple curtain was torn in two, those witnessing the events were left in awe, just as the psalmist sang:

***All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations***

***shall worship before you.
For kingship belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.***

[Psalm 22:27-28]

Jesus was despised, but He was undefeated. The King of the Jews would die, but through His death “all the families of the nations” would worship Him.



PRAYER

Father, thank you for sending Jesus to die for us. Thank you that He endured the punishment we all deserve so we can truly worship you. Please help us to stand in awe when we consider the events of Good Friday, just as those who witnessed the death of Jesus did. Amen.

Saturday

THE RESTING
LORD OF THE
SABBATH

*And on the seventh day
God finished his work
that he had done, and
he rested on the seventh
day from all his work
that he had done.*

GENESIS 2:2

God created the heavens and the earth—light and darkness, time and space, land and water, plants and animals, man and woman... And then, He “rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.” His work of creating all that is was complete.

It was finished.

During the days leading up to His death, Jesus was preparing to complete His greatest work: the redemption of sinners. And so He was arrested, beaten, tortured, nailed to a cross and left to die. And as He hung on the cross, in a loud voice he cried, “It is finished” [John 19:30].

And then, He died.

The Bible says very little about what happened on the day following Jesus’ death, but we do know one thing: it was the Sabbath. It was the seventh day, the day set aside as a time of rest before the Lord. No work was to be done. And this was what brought Jesus into so much conflict with the Pharisees. He was continually doing “works” on the Sabbath—and for this, they persecuted Him. But Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath, and just as His Father was working, so too was He working [Matthew 12:8; John 5:17].

But now, His work was finished.

And the Lord of the Sabbath “rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done”—just like His Father.



PRAYER

Father, few words should fill us with more joy than those telling us how you rested from your work. Thank you that Jesus imitated you completely by resting from His own work, the redemption of our souls. Help us to follow in this example as well—to enjoy the rest that you have given us, not only from the work of our daily lives, but the futile work of trying to save ourselves. Amen.

Easter Sunday

THE
SENT ONE
SENDS

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again,

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

JOHN 20:19-21

The third day had come. The tomb was empty, just as Jesus had promised. But instead of finding the disciples rejoicing and boldly proclaiming the resurrection, we find them hiding behind a locked door, afraid of the Jewish leaders who had put Jesus to death.

And then Jesus showed up and everything changed.

“Peace be with you,” He said, holding up his hands and showing His side. And their fears were gone. Jesus’ promise was true—He had risen from the dead. This was not a hoax or an imaginary story. This was the living, breathing Son of God standing before them, who was about to tell them something important: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21).

Now, Jesus said, they were to go and speak. They had seen with their own eyes. Jesus had won victory over sin and death; He had paid for their sins in full. And now, they—and we like them—were to go and tell the world. The Sent One became the Sender, and the world would be turned upside down.



PRAYER

Father, thank you for the resurrection of Jesus, and that because of this day, we have such good news to tell the world. Just as Jesus sent out His disciples to make disciples of all nations, you've called us to do the same. Please give us boldness to speak as we ought, to not keep the good news of Jesus' victory over Satan, sin and death to ourselves but to share it gladly and joyfully as we worship You. Amen.

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