



A HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL 2023

A gift from the Chaplains at Christian Care Communities.



Day 1: Sunday, April 2

God of the Impossible

“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53)

IN WORD God can do impossible things. Just look at the revealed testimonies to His power: “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14); “Do I lack the strength to rescue you?” (Isaiah 50:2); “Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27); “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26); and, “Everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9:23). We may pray and wonder what God’s will is in a situation, but we should never—under any circumstances—wonder if He can meet our needs. The Creator of heaven and earth can do anything.

As He approached His Passion, Jesus had no doubts about the Father’s power. The only question was God’s will in the situation, and to that, Jesus submitted willingly.

When we pray, we want God’s power to be at our disposal. We want the power first, and our submission afterward. That’s not God’s way, and that’s not what Jesus did.

He spent years demonstrating submission before He demonstrated miracles. Answers to prayer were not the ultimate goal for Him; obedience was. God’s will was. The plan of salvation and the Kingdom of God were. Miracles were only a small part of the bigger purpose.

IN DEED Do we pray with that kind of focus? Not usually. We sometimes seek answers to prayer without setting our commitment to Kingdom purposes first. But if we can be firmly allied with God’s great plan—even when it hurts our short-term interests—we can pray with the power of Jesus. We can call on the Father, knowing that He’ll put angels and His Spirit at our disposal. We will have demonstrated that “at our disposal” is a trustworthy place to invest His unlimited resources.

Have a firm commitment to God’s Kingdom at whatever cost to your agenda. Then pray. Pray with power and with faith. With God, nothing is impossible.

READ: Matthew 26:47-54

“The world appears very little to a soul that contemplates the greatness of God.”

– Brother Lawrence

Day 2: Monday, April 3

Sinners at the Cross

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
(Matthew 26:28)

IN WORD Our human responses to sin would be amusing if they weren’t so contrary to truth:

- We cover it up, like Adam and Eve in the Garden. We know it’s there, but we don’t admit it to God, and we certainly don’t let others see it—that would be too humiliating.
- We deny it’s there. We come up with justifications such as “Everyone is basically good,” and “I’m OK, you’re OK.” We relegate sin to the aberrant folks who end up in prisons and psychiatric wards.
- We redefine it. It’s not sin—it’s a weakness, a character flaw, human nature.
- We try to compensate God for it. We do good works, we come up with all sorts of religions and rituals, we make vows of obedience for tomorrow to make up for disobedience yesterday. We try to make the good in us outweigh the bad.

IN DEED But the Cross—the disfigured, bloody form on the tree, the picture of the penalty we deserved—undoes all of our approaches to the problem. There, in plain daylight, the innocent sacrifice takes our shame upon Himself. We can either own up to the need for that sacrifice, or we can persist in one of the pitiful solutions above. But when we really see God’s assessment of our situation—that we were worthy of this brutality, this ultimate ransom for our rebellion—how can we degrade the sacrifice with our shallow attempts to deny our need? “How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3).

We can’t. No, at the Cross we see who we are, and we are humbled. We see the ugliness of our sin, and we are speechless. We know we can make no claim of our own righteousness before God. But Jesus is our claim. We bow before Him. We know He is there for us.

READ: Matthew 26:26-30

“At Calvary, the naked truth is staring down at us, challenging us to drop the pose and own the truth.”

—Roy Hession

Day 3: Tuesday, April 4

God at the Cross

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
(Matthew 26:28)

IN WORD God’s response to our sin pulls no punches. It is a graver assessment than we thought. The righteous God of Israel, who spent thousands of years of Old Testament history condemning disobedience and idolatry, finally unleashes His full wrath for the human rebellion—on His own perfect Son. The observers in the heavenlies—angels, demons, and anyone else who sees God more clearly than we do—must have staggered at the sight. The enemy had tirelessly worked for centuries corrupting the creation, and the creation willfully went along with his treason. All the while, God stored up His anger. Yet when God’s judgment came, He had already sent an innocent Deliverer to stand in front of the Judge’s fury.

The Cross is God’s wrath made plain. It is also God’s love made plain. No man-made religion can claim such a God. All other deities are either so angry that they can’t be appeased, or so innocuous that they are meaningless. Nowhere else in the universe—even in fertile imaginations—have justice and grace been reconciled so completely.

IN DEED No human being could have come up with this plan. No human religion could have laid down a centuries-old sacrificial system to so perfectly foreshadow what would be fulfilled in one individual—the same individual who also happened to deliver the most profound teachings the world has ever heard. No, the blood of the covenant poured out at the Cross comes from the hand of God—in judgment and in love.

Meditate on the judgment of God. It was harsh and heavy. It is a true assessment of our offense. Meditate also on the grace of God. It is a love far above our understanding that pays so high a price for so unworthy a purchase. Meditate and marvel at the staggering plan of God.

READ: Matthew 26:26-30

“As you sit and gaze, it will be born in you that only a crucified Savior could meet your need.”
—William Sangster

Day 4: Wednesday, April 5

A Beautiful Thing

“She has done a very beautiful thing to me.” (Mark 14:6)

IN WORD The story is a familiar one to many people: In the days preceding His death, a woman breaks open a clay jar of expensive perfume and anoints Jesus with it. It is an appropriate preparation for His burial, Jesus says, despite the protests of some at this dinner party. The formality of the dinner is not relevant, and neither is the “waste” of the precious perfume, He says. She has done a beautiful thing.

Not only has this woman (Mary of Bethany, according to John 12:3) done a beautiful thing in anointing Jesus for burial with a precious fragrance, she has done a beautiful thing by giving us an accurate illustration of the life of a believer. Like the vessel of nard, we are also to be broken and poured out at the feet of the Savior, as He was broken and emptied for us.

The illustration is a running theme in the New Testament. “We have this treasure in jars of clay,” Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, emphasizing later that he is being poured out for the sake of the gospel (Philippians 2; 2 Timothy 4). Your life as a believer is to be a life of your most valuable treasures being emptied at the feet of the Lord. It is not a waste. It is a fragrant offering.

IN DEED We may be tempted at times to feel as if our service for the Lord is a waste of time and resources. Like Mary’s act of service, ours may bear no visible fruit, and it may impress no one else at the party. But motivation is the key. Is it done in pure devotion? Is it an offering of the best we have for the One we treasure most? Is it prompted by a passion for the character and work of our Savior? Then it is not a waste. A vessel broken so that its treasure might be devoted to Jesus is the kind of sacrifice that pleases Him most. It is what He asks of us, and it is a fragrant aroma to Him. It is a beautiful thing.

READ: Mark 14:3-9; John 12:3

“The oil of the lamp in the temple burnt away in giving light; so should we.”

– Robert Murray M’Cheyne

Day 5: Thursday, April 6

The Resurrection Promise

“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” (Mark 9:31)

IN WORD Death surrounds us. It is on our TVs and in our newspapers. It has taken family members and friends. It will come to each of us. For all who are crushed by the reality of the Fall, Jesus gives this promise: There is a resurrection.

Perhaps we have heard this from the pulpit so often that we have lost a sense of amazement over this impossible claim. But think about it. This just does not happen, at least not visibly. Most religions have some concept of an afterlife, but a man being physically raised from the dead? No one ever made such a claim. Except Jesus. Even His disciples, who had seen Him raise Lazarus, a widow’s son, and a little girl, were dumbfounded (v. 32). They didn’t know what to make of this prediction, because it was beyond the realm of possibility. People die and they are buried. Period.

But Jesus erased the period. His resurrection, far from being an exclusive privilege of the Son of God, means everything for us. It reversed the curse of death that we brought upon ourselves at the Fall. It is the re-genesis—the beginning of a new creation. And we are invited to be a part of it.

IN DEED The promise of this resurrection is astounding. Every privilege of the risen Jesus, in all of His glory, is offered to us to partake in. It is the reality of the eternal promises of God. In His resurrection, He intercedes for us at the right hand of God (Hebrews 7:25); He lives in us (John 14:20, Galatians 2:20); and He exercises all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Not only is He exalted, but we are seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6); we are fellow heirs of His inheritance (Romans 8:17); and we have eternal life (John 6:40).

These are magnificent and astonishing truths. We could spend a lifetime—make that an eternity—letting them sink in. Today, meditate and marvel at the promise of the Resurrection.

READ: Mark 9:30-32

“Death died when Christ rose.”

— Anonymous

Day 6: Friday, April 7

The Passion of Jesus

When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. (Matthew 27:50)

IN WORD The movies often portray a calm, collected Jesus—sad and in pain, but always glassy-eyed and dignified—in their depictions of the crucifixion. And certainly we don't doubt His confidence. He came into this world to die and rise again, and He knew that. He did not hang on that cross with doubts about His identity or God's plan. No, He hung there only with pain.

But what pain it was! This was no dignified event; it was raw and excruciating. And the incarnate God—the One in whom infinite feelings were embodied in one frail, fleshly being—suffered. It wasn't a calm, quiet suffering; it was loud and tortured. He screamed out the first line of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He thirsted. He refused sedatives that would have lessened the pain (but also the judgment). And then He yelled out again. The agonizing cry of Matthew 27:50 was His last shout before His resurrection. But it wasn't His last shout forever. He will shout again (1 Thessalonians 4:16). And when He does, it will be exciting.

Do you know the emotional, joyful Jesus? He is passionate from His cross to His return. He is coming again with a loud command, a shout—a noisy, triumphant declaration of final victory. Jesus never just went through the motions—never. He is not a dispassionate Savior.

IN DEED Why should that matter to us? Because we're often given a false picture of Jesus. Our traditions imply that God created us with deep emotions but never shared them while He was in the flesh. We often envision a Lord who is robotic and matter-of-fact, not a Lord who is in excruciating pain on one end of the emotional spectrum and noisily celebrating His victory on the other. But our Jesus is enthusiastic about His plan and exuberant about those He has redeemed. His joy is unbridled. As you think about His resurrection and His Kingdom this week, it's okay if yours is, too.

READ: Matthew 27:45-50

"Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn."

—John Wesley

Day 7: Saturday, April 8

Exchanged Lives

“I am the resurrection and the life.” (John 11:25)

IN WORD The death of Jesus is for the believer everything we need for the forgiveness of our sins. In a sense, we and all of our sin died with Jesus on the cross. His death is the penalty of our rebellion and the price of our pardon. The wrath of God is satisfied in the Cross, and we are free from that awful, awful burden.

But the story of the Christian life does not end with forgiveness. If we and all of our sin died with Jesus on the cross, who then lives? We cannot say on the one hand that we died with Him and on the other hand that we are still alive in our natural selves. We must choose—our old life or its death. And if we choose its death, then how do we live on?

Paul gives us the glorious answer: “I no longer live but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). The life that we live by faith is an exchanged life—everything that we were went with Jesus on the cross; everything that He is was raised from the tomb and is given to us. We gave up everything in our old nature, in all of our lostness, to have that substitute on the cross. In return, we gained the life of the everlasting Son of the living God, with all of His privileges and power. What an exchange!

IN DEED The sad truth about this exchange—and it is the only sad thing about it—is that we are forgetful creatures. Having accepted the Cross as our payment for sin, we forget to live in the Resurrection that follows. Our old natures want to ignore their death certificate. Their demise is a legal fact, not a biological reality (yet). They remind us of what we were before the Cross. And we listen.

Yet Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He offers to fill us with His glorified self. The substitution of the cross is not just in death, but in resurrection. We may now live in the power that raised Him. But only if we live by faith. Are you living that life? Or better yet, is He living that life in you? Believe it. Believe in the Resurrection and the Life. And be reminded daily: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

READ: John 11:21-26

“Because of the Resurrection, everything changes.”

— Max Lucado

Day 8: Sunday, April 9

The Living Lord

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5)

IN WORD The women who had followed Jesus waited until the Sabbath was over, and then went to the tomb to care for Jesus’ body. What they saw startled them: two gleaming angels questioning their task. It would disorient any of us, and it certainly disoriented them.

The angels’ question is loaded with meaning. In one brief sentence, they have told the women that Jesus is alive, that death has not contained Him, that their Lord is still their Lord, and that life will never be the same. It couldn’t have all sunk in right away, but at least the women knew that something incredible had happened. They were looking in the wrong place for the Lord of life. He doesn’t dwell in cemeteries.

That’s old news for us, isn’t it? We celebrate it annually—and contemplate its meaning even more frequently. It’s not exactly a startling question for us. With twenty centuries of celebration, it has sunk in: Jesus is alive. We know that.

But imagine God asking you the same question: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Would it apply? Do we not do that often? We read the Bible as a historical document rather than as a living Word. We follow Jesus as our example rather than listening to Him as our living Lord. We take our cues from our denominational traditions rather than from the Spirit of Life. In other words, we turn our faith toward dead things rather than toward the Living One.

IN DEED That doesn’t mean that the Bible isn’t good history, or that Jesus is not our perfect example, or even that our denominational traditions are off base. It simply means that those things aren’t the substance of our faith. Jesus is. Not Jesus the historical figure, but Jesus our constant companion. Not Jesus the martyr, but Jesus the still-living sacrifice and High Priest. Not Jesus our founder, but Jesus our leader. Knowing the life that He still lives—that powerful, present life—we must ask ourselves: Why do we look for the living among the dead?

READ: Luke 24:1-8

“Jesus is the greatest influence in the world today.”

– W. H. Griffith Thomas

Day 9: Monday, April 10

God-Man

“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

IN WORD The resurrected Jesus showed His wounds to the doubting disciple, and floodlights filled Thomas’ mind with truth. He couldn’t restrain his reaction: He not only called Jesus “Lord”—he had likely done that many times before—but he also called Him “God.” That doesn’t flow easily from the mouth of one human being to another. Only a crisis of the soul can lead us to such a conclusion. Thomas had such a crisis. He had doubted the Resurrection and then was confronted with the incarnate Word about it. It blew his mind.

The same thing happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. Initially, Paul didn’t know whom he had seen, but he knew enough to call Him “Lord” (Acts 9:5). The response must have been staggering: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Like Thomas, it blew Paul’s mind.

This world isn’t very comfortable with God-men. We’ve only had one—the only One—and He didn’t fare too well in public opinion polls. Neither have His disciples. We’ve had a hard time convincing the skeptics that there really are holes in the hands and feet, and that there really is a dazzling Lord who can appear to His persecutors whenever He wants. Many in the church are not exactly comfortable with the deity of Jesus, either. Teacher, Healer, Prophet, and such titles are generally not a problem. Even “Lord” seems to fit. But God Himself? In human flesh? A rabbi in the Middle East a couple of millennia ago? We’re not sure we want to go that far.

IN DEED The story of Thomas’ moment of truth is noteworthy because of Jesus’ silence on the subject of His deity. Thomas calls Him “God” to His face—and Jesus never corrects him! Angels who are mistakenly worshiped in Scripture correct their worshipers, but not Jesus. He let it go. He let it go because Thomas wasn’t wrong; He let it go because Thomas was right. Thomas’ moment of truth was entirely true. And that’s critical for us to grasp. We can’t worship the Father in truth without worshiping the Son. Maybe it takes a crisis of the soul to get there, but we must. Jesus is our God in the flesh—and that blows our minds.

READ: John 20:24-30

“If Jesus Christ is not true God, how could He help us? And if He is not true man, how could He help us?”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer



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