

The Cross Reminds Us

Lenten Devotionals - Week 7

Monday, March 29, 2021

Read John 11:50-57

One Man Should Die

“You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed. He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation.” (John 11:50-51 NLT)

Today’s reading continues the account of Jesus standing trial before the Jewish religious leaders. As we read these words again today, we recall that Caiaphas, the chief priests and the Pharisees had a problem, a political problem. They feared Roman domination of the Jews. They feared losing their place and their power. So, Caiaphas gave timely advice, and they thought they had a political solution – the execution of Jesus and the end of this crazy sect. “It’s better that one man should die for the people.”

Caiaphas didn’t know how truly he had spoken. He didn’t know that he had announced a spiritual solution to a spiritual problem. God’s plan for the redemption of fallen humankind was nearing completion. The Pharisees thought they were in control of the situation, but God was in control. It was His will that one Man should die for the people. That had been the plan all along.

“You shall give Him the name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

Prayer Focus: Heavenly Father, thank You that one Man, your Son Jesus, died for me and for all. Help us share this wonderful news with others.

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

Read Matthew 26:31-56

Suffering Servant

“All this has taken place so that the Scriptures of the prophets will be fulfilled.” (Matthew 26:56 NASB)

Long before the Incarnation, the Scriptures foretold the suffering of Christ in vivid detail, and the Gospels record the fulfillment:

“I will offer my back to those who whip me and my cheeks to those who pluck hairs out of my beard. I will not turn my face away from those who humiliate me and spit on me.” (Isaiah 50:6)

“Then they spit in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him.” (Matthew 26:67)

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth.” (Isaiah 53:7a)

“The high priest ... questioned Jesus saying, ‘Do you make no answer?’ But He kept silent.” (Mark 14:60-60)

The Psalmists also foretold the Savior’s suffering:

“They gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (Psalm 69:21)

“And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine.” (Luke 23:36)

“They pierced my hands and my feet.” (Psalm 22:16)

“Thomas said, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’” (John 20:25)

During holy week, may we reflect with wonder on the many ways that Jesus, our Suffering Servant, fulfilled exactly what Scripture had foretold, for it was God’s design from first to last. “Thus shall He sprinkle many nations.” (Isaiah 53:15)

Prayer Focus: Thank God that the prophesied rescue for sinners has come true and that the Suffering Servant willingly suffered out of love for you, for all.

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

Read Matthew 27:33-51

Access to God

“And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” (Matthew 27:50-51a NASB)

The curtain of the temple must have been beautiful. The book of Exodus tells us it was made of blue, purple and scarlet materials, of fine twisted linen, and was the work of highly skilled craftsmen. It hung upon golden hooks from pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold, and it served as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies. The holy of holies was a place only the high priest could enter once a year to offer sacrifices on the Day of Atonement.

But when Jesus died, the usefulness of this beautiful curtain came to an end. As the perfect sacrifice, Jesus opened forever the way to God. No more sacrifices are required; no earthly priest need intercede for us. The veil is cast aside. The Heavenly Father reaches out to us and says, “Come!”

Prayer Focus: Take some time to thank Jesus for opening the way for you to have a living relationship with God. Thank Him for the blessing of knowing the One who created you, loves you, and redeemed you.

Thursday, April 1, 2021

Read Matthew 27:11-26

The Innocent Man

“So Pilate ... took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’” (Matthew 27:24 RSV)

Pilate was kidding himself. When it came to being responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion, he was as culpable as the chief priests and elders and the angry mob. When the crowd roared, “His blood be on us and on our children,” they spoke truer words than they may have known. The sins of all humankind led Jesus to the cross. We are the guilty ones, you and me.

Though Pilate tried, innocence cannot be obtained by washing hands. Water is not sufficient to cleanse us. Only the blood of Jesus can do that. As we observe Maundy Thursday and celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we can take comfort in the truth that it is Christ’s blood, freely outpoured, that washes the blood off our hands and sets us free.

Prayer Focus: Lord Jesus, we stand amazed at Your offering of love. We praise You for shedding Your blood that we may be clean and made new.

Friday, April 2, 2021

Read Romans 8:35-39

More Than Conquerors

“In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37 RSV)

This well-known and well-loved passage has an ironic twist to it. “More than conquerors” sounds great, but what about “in all these things”? Paul describes some of “these things” in the preceding verses: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword. People who experience these things don’t sound like conquerors; they sound like the ones conquered, defeated. What kind of conquerors are we, anyhow?

Certainly not the world’s kind, measured by its standards of victory and success. But definitely God’s kind of conquerors – spiritual victors through Him who loved us.

When Jesus was taken down from the cross and His bruised body was laid in a newly hewn tomb, He didn’t look like a conqueror. Persecution, nakedness, peril and sword had done their best, and it looked like they had defeated Him. But Jesus had won an unseen victory. He conquered sin and Satan and death forever, transforming us from slaves of sin and self-centered living to God’s own dear children who freely love Him and others.

This is the victory we will celebrate on Easter Sunday. This is the reason we say, “Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

Prayer Focus: Pray that you would rely on the finished work of Christ to make you more than a conqueror each day.