

BIBLE STUDY for LENT 2023

A Seven Week Study of Jesus' Final Days

The season on Lent is all about following and understanding the passion of Christ. Our past viewings of "The Chosen" has provided us a more pictorial look into that region, the culture and the daily lives of first century Israel. The regional audience at the time included Jews, Gentiles, and Romans.

With the gift of hindsight, we shall look into the synoptic gospels with the hopes of understanding why each writer selected and included details to depict Jesus as he felt critical for the community of faith for which he was writing.

Lesson 1: The Shape of the Gospel

Mark 8:31; 9:31 & 10:32-34

Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23 & 20:17-19

Luke 9:22; 9:44 & 18:31-33

1. Three Predictions of the Passion.

In each of the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus predicts his impending suffering and death three times. The pattern is seen most clearly in Mark, where the verse numbers are almost identical – 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32-34. The pattern is less obvious in Matthew and Luke, but is just as definite.

The intended reader/audience helps to distinguish what would be important to share with them in writing.

Matthew – wrote to a *Jewish* audience referencing Christ as Son of David.

Mark wrote to Gentile readers, more particularly a *Roman* audience, referencing Christ as a Servant.

Luke wrote to an all *Gentile* audience referencing Christ as the Son of Man.

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To trace the pattern, read the parallel accounts in their context. As you read each passage describe how the disciples reacted to Jesus' predictions of the Passion.

First prediction: Read Mark 8:27-33; Matthew 16:13-23 and Luke 9:18-22

Second Prediction: Read Mark 9:30-32; Matthew 17:22-23; and Luke 9:43-45.

Third Prediction: Read Mark 10:32-34; Matthew 20:17-19; and Luke 18:31-34.

2. What contributions does Mark make to the study of the life of Jesus?

What does Mark offer that the other Gospels does not provide?

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Lesson 2: An Account of Isolation and Conflict

Matthew 16:1 – 23:39

In Matthew the turning point in Jesus' life and ministry occurred when he took the disciples to the north for a retreat at Caesarea Philippi (16:13-20). On this occasion Jesus asked who they thought him to be. As we note from last week, Simon Peter replied for the band confessing him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus named Simon "the Rock," and declared "on this Rock" he would build the church.

Until the retreat at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' ministry had been public, as he traveled among the crowds, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, teaching the multitudes, and healing the sick, infirmed and lame. Beginning with the retreat he increasingly withdrew from the crowds and directed his teaching and preaching to his band of disciples, training and preparing them for their ministry in establishing the church after his death. Occasions of continuing public ministry on the way to Jerusalem were often followed by private instructions to the disciples, explaining what he had done or taught. *Caesarea Philippi was the turning point from public to private ministry*, from an open offering of the gospel to the multitudes to training the disciples to assume their role of leadership in the new people of God. Jesus began the process of turning over his ministry to the disciples, who were to form, shape and build the church.

Isolation

It is ironic, therefore, that the narratives report a number of occasions in which the disciples failed to understand Jesus and proposed courses of action which were contrary to the divine will.

The isolation culminated in the total abandonment by the disciples at the time of Jesus' arrest. The disciples fled in confusion and fear, and were not even present at the crucifixion. Only the women who had provided and cared for Jesus since his ministry in Galilee stood by him at the foot of the cross.

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Conflict

After the retreat to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' conflict with the Jewish authorities rapidly increased, as they perceived his threat to them. Their opposition grew and they began to conspire against him. They openly discussed ways to get rid of him. Their plans to destroy Jesus culminated in their conspiracy with Judas to betray him and arrest him.

Read the series of **Woes** which Jesus pronounced against the Jewish leaders in Matthew 23:1-39.

List six charges with which Jesus accused them of hypocrisy.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Which charges can you most readily identify?

Which charges are most vague and difficult to apply?

The animosity and conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities raises serious questions of toleration between religious groups of varying beliefs.

What are some principles of tolerance with persons whose faith and doctrine or whose religious practices differ from our own?

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Lesson 3: A Travel Narrative

Luke 9:51 – 19:44

A Relentless Journey

The travel narrative of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is the dominant feature of the Gospel of Luke. It is the longest section (9:51 – 19:48). The compulsive character of the journey was set after Luke 9:44. From this point on Jesus would not turn back. He was determined to go to Jerusalem even though, he knew he would be arrested, tried and executed in the city. Nothing the disciples could say or do could deter him. He would not heed even a warning by the Pharisees that Herod sought to kill him, insisting that it was his destiny to die in Jerusalem.

Luke's Parable Collection

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' favorite teaching method was by parables. There are 37 parables, or 39 if a couple with similar themes but different details are read as individual stories rather than duplicates. Luke includes the most, 26, while Matthew has 22 and Mark has eight. Luke also has the most found only in one Gospel – 13, with 9 in Matthew and two only in Mark.

In Luke, the parables are spread throughout the travel narrative. The greatest concentration is in chapters 15-18. Most of Luke's parables, especially those peculiar to Luke, are stories related to teach lessons of human nature and ethical behavior. Jesus told them to instruct the hearers in righteousness and to show what God expects of the chosen people in their personal lives. Jesus' most profound teaching on discipleship.

Read and write a brief sentence on what you think the parable teaches.

- The Good Samaritan (10:25-27)
- The Rich Fool (12:13-21)
- The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (15:3-10)

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- The Prodigal Son (15:11-32)
- The Unjust Steward (16:1-9)
- Dives and Lazarus (16:19-31)
- The Unjust Judge (18:1-8)
- The Pharisee and the Publican (18:9-14)

The lessons and parables of the Travel Narrative explore the meaning of discipleship as sharing with Jesus in his suffering and death.

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Lesson 4: A Holy Week in Jerusalem

Matthew 21:10-17

Mark 11:1-11

Luke 19:28-44

Riding to a Coronation

Jesus' last week began with a Triumphal Entry into the Holy City. He rode a donkey along the road from Jericho, via Bethphage and Bethany, passing by the Mount of Olives. The irony of Jesus' entry is startling. The week began with the crowds acclaiming him king. It would end with them demanding his death. It began with them singing "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord," and "Hosanna in the highest." It would end with them mocking, taunting, deriding and cursing him as he hung on the cross. It began with the disciples spreading their cloaks for a royal saddle, strewing branches to form a royal road. It would end with them deserting him in his moment of distress, running away in fear and despair.

In his last week he went from coronation to crucifixion; from sovereign Lord to servant; from triumph to despair. But through it all, he remained a king, King of the Jews, and King of Kings.

How does Mark's account differ from the reports of Matthew and Luke?

Cleansing the Temple

Jesus' first action in the city was to visit the temple where he drove out the moneychangers and merchants selling animals for sacrifice. Cleansing the temple was a preparation for Jesus' ministry of teaching. It was a purification of the holy place where Jesus would teach the Word of God. Each day he came to the temple to teach; and each evening he returned to Bethany to spend the night and sleep.

The primary focus of the temple teaching in Matthew is the growing conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. They complained because children were singing praise to Jesus. The main body of the temple teachings consists of legal debates over the meaning of the Torah.

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In Matthew 21:23-27, read the Pharisees' challenge made against Jesus' authority to teach.

- What were the issues of conflict between them?
- How did Jesus answer their challenge?
- What was their response?

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Lesson 5: A Last Supper in the Upper Room

Matthew 26:1-30

Mark 14:1-26

Luke 22:1-39

From the beginning to end the meal was overshadowed by the dark clouds of Jesus' rapidly approaching death.

The sacrament is a meal of remembrance. It recalls the death of Christ by which we are saved.

Bread – symbolizing the body of Jesus broken for us.

Cup – symbolizing the blood of Christ shed for the remission of our sins, allow us to relive his sacrifice to redeem us.

But it is no sad and morose occasion. It is the experience of our highest joy, for it *leads us to renew our faith in Jesus Christ*, the Lamb of God, the Son of God crucified for us, which is God's gift to save us.

Read the parallel accounts Matthew 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-26 & Luke 22:14-23.

Make a list of what happened in each account.

Matthew:

Mark:

Luke:

What is included in all three narratives?

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What differences can you find?

If we had only accounts of Matthew and Mark, what would we miss?

Read **Paul's account of the Institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.**

Which of the Gospel accounts did Paul follow most closely?

What did Paul add?

Closed communion – the Lord's supper restricted to the baptized members belonging to the same denomination or the same church.

Open communion – the Lord's supper open to all Christians and not restricted to those of a particular denomination or those meeting a specific qualification (as baptism by immersion).

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Lesson 6: Gethsemane and a Sentence of Death

Matthew 26:30 – 27:26

Mark 14:26 – 15:15

Luke 22:39 – 23:25

From the Upper Room Jesus led the disciples to a secluded spot in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. The brief, quiet retreat for spiritual strength prepared him for the ordeal to come.

Luke emphasizes the spiritual benefit, reporting that an angel from heaven appeared and gave him strength. The Gospels differ in details of the story, but all describe Jesus' anguished prayer for deliverance, demonstrating both his humanity and his divinity. He pled for God to deliver him, asking if it were possible that he be spared from drinking the bitter cup. It was an honest prayer. He wanted to escape the suffering. Nevertheless, he submitted totally to God's will.

It is common in devotional reflections to focus on Jesus' submission to God's plan. However, affirming the perfect obedience of the Son to the Father, we should not lose sight of Jesus' agony and torment in the plea: "*If it is possible, let this cup pass by me.*" Nor the symbol of desertion by the disciples.

Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane: (Discussion)

What does it reveal about the character of Jesus?

What does it about the disciples?

How did it benefit Jesus?

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In these final hours, we have:

Jesus and Peter

Jesus and Judas

Jesus and the Jews

Jesus and the Romans

Denial and Desertion

Betrayal and Arrest

Trial before the Sanhedrin

Trial before Pilate

Consider Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter and their role in the story of Jesus' arrest and trial. Jesus predicted both Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial.

How did each react to Jesus' prediction?

How does the practice of prayer give us strength?

Consider the judicial roles of:

The High Priest Caiaphas

The Galilean Tetrarch Herod

The Roman Governor Pontius Pilate

In looking at each of the above's role, who bears the responsibility for ordering the crucifixion of Jesus?

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Lesson 7: He was Crucified, Dead and Buried

Matthew 27:24-66

Mark 15: 15-47

Luke 23:24-56

The road that took Jesus from his conviction and sentence to death, in the court of Pontius Pilate, through his crucifixion, to his burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, was a trail of suffering and sorrow. The way of the cross was a road of pain and grief.

Via Crucis – *the Way of the Cross*

Via Dolorosa – *the Way of Suffering*

The Stations of the Cross

First Station: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (*Matthew 26:36-41*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us your strength and wisdom, that we may seek to follow your will in all things.

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Second Station: Jesus, Betrayed by Judas, is Arrested

Then, while [Jesus] was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, "the man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely." He came and immediately went over to him and said, "Rabbi." And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. (*Mark 14: 43-46*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us the courage of our convictions that our lives may faithfully reflect the good news you bring.

Third Station: Jesus is Condemned by the Sanhedrin

When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us," but he replied to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question, you will not respond. But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth." (*Luke 22: 66-71*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us your sense of righteousness that we may never cease to work to bring about the justice of the kingdom that you promised.

Fourth Station: Jesus is Denied by Peter

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. One of the maids came over to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it in front of everyone, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about!" As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazorean." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man!" A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away." At that

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he began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken: "Before the cock crows you will deny me three times." He went out and began to weep bitterly. (*Matthew 26: 69-75*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us the gift of honesty that we may not fear to speak the truth even when difficult.

Fifth Station: Jesus is Judged by Pilate

The chief priests with the elders and the scribes, that is, the whole Sanhedrin, held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." The chief priests accused him of many things. Again Pilate questioned him, "Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of." Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.... Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barrabas... [and] handed [Jesus] over to be crucified. (*Mark 15: 1-5, 15*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us discernment that we may see as you see, not as the world sees.

Sixth Station: Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck him repeatedly. (*John 19: 1-3*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us patience in times of suffering that we may offer our lives as a sacrifice of praise.

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Seventh Station: Jesus Bears the Cross

When the chief priests and the guards saw [Jesus] they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt in him." ... They cried out, "Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. (*John 19: 6, 15-17*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us strength of purpose that we may faithfully bear our crosses each day.

Eighth Station: Jesus is Helped by Simon the Cyrenian to Carry the Cross

They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. (*Mark 15: 21*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us willing spirits that we may be your instruments on earth.

Ninth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Reader: A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' At that time, people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?" (*Luke 23: 27-31*)

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Prayer: Lord, grant us gentle spirits that we may comfort those who mourn.

Tenth Station: Jesus is Crucified

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."] (*Luke 23: 33-34*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us merciful hearts that we may bring your reconciliation and forgiveness to all.

Eleventh Station: Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (*Luke 23: 39-43*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us perseverance that we may never stop seeking you.

Twelfth Station: Jesus Speaks to His Mother and the Disciple

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. (*John 19: 25-27*)

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Prayer: Lord, grant us constancy that we may be willing to stand by those in need.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last. (*Luke 23: 44-46*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us trust in you that when our time on earth is ended our spirits may come to you without delay.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Placed in the Tomb

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it [in] clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. (*Matthew 27: 57-60*)

Prayer: Lord, grant us your compassion that we may always provide for those in need.