

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 8th Apr 2019)**Read - Luke 19:28-40**

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" v 37-38

The Jews had great expectations of Jesus that day. For centuries they had looked forward to the coming of a Messiah, a mighty warrior king who would rise up and conquer their oppressors and re-establish the great kingdom of Israel. So many times they had been conquered, oppressed and taken into exile in foreign lands. They wanted someone who would set them free. They expected, wanted, Jesus to be that man.

Jesus indeed came to set them free, but not politically or militarily. True freedom lies deeper. It can only begin when God is placed firmly at the centre of one's life and one's heart. All Jesus' teaching and his ministry was focussed on that single truth. He would never be a political or military Messiah. He was concerned far more with what was inside a man or a woman, because it is there that the true things that hold us in bondage lie; our hatreds, our lust, our addictions, our pain, our grief, our fears, our greed and selfishness, our longings, our sinful tendencies. These are the things from which we must be liberated if we are to find real freedom.

Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free

Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand, Imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand. (Hymns and Psalms 714)

DAY 2**Read - Philippians 3:7-11**

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. v8

What are your expectations for your life? What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

When we are young our expectations may be about having fun, or getting through school, or what career we will follow, or who we will marry one day. As we get older those expectations change and become more complex. If we are married and have a family our expectations will be tied up with others; those of our families and our loved ones. When we are old our expectations tend to become more limited, like trying to stay healthy, or maybe just getting through the day. But we all have expectations, no matter at what stage of life we may be.

When our hopes and dreams are focussed mainly on ourselves (our wants, our needs), we generally tend to live unfulfilled lives. Expectations that are self-centred never lead to a satisfied life. Often we leave it too late to change our priorities and centre ourselves on more worthwhile values.

But when God is at the centre of our lives, things are different. Our expectations and hopes take on a more balanced and healthy form. We think more about the needs and welfare of others. Our goals are centred on God's kingdom and his will for the world. We think about what contribution we can make to those greater outcomes. We can die knowing that our life made a positive difference.

Lord Jesus, may my hopes and dreams be focussed on you and your will for my life. Help me to be less self-centred I pray.

DAY 3**Read - John 6:53-69**

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. v 66

What are your expectations of Jesus?

Immediately following the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus taught the crowds that followed him the he was the Bread of Life. He went on to say, *"This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* And then he said, *"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."* He was of course referring prophetically to the sacrament of Holy Communion that his followers would one day celebrate. But many of those who had followed him up to this point, found this teaching too hard to take and they turned back and stopped following him. They had wrong expectations.

Sometimes we have wrong expectations of Jesus. We want him to answer all our prayers the way we want them answered. We want the benefits but none of the pain. We want his blessing on our lives or on what we are doing, but we are living lives that are immoral or not seriously committed to him. Or we either distort or misunderstand some aspect of his teaching and end up with false ideas of what we want him to do for us.

It is so important to be balanced in what we believe and expect of Jesus. We must embrace the whole of what he taught about salvation, and the way he wants us to live, and how we should care for others, and not leave out the parts we find uncomfortable, or difficult to understand.

Lord help me to accept the whole of your teaching and not leave out the bits I find hard or inconvenient.

DAY 4

Read - Matthew 16:13-20

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. v18

What are God's expectations for you and me?

Jesus saw great potential in Simon; the rough, uneducated, impetuous fisherman who had followed him; that one day he would turn out to be a rock; a strong foundation on which his church would be built. Jesus saw beyond his weaknesses and failings to what Simon could become when the Holy Spirit filled him and changed him at Pentecost.

Do you know that God sees potential in you? Genesis puts it this way, *"So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27)*. God made you and me, every person, in his image or likeness. You have been created with "God potential" in you. Your sin or your circumstances may have marred that image, but it is still there, hidden and broken maybe, but there. The secret is that whenever a person commits their life to Jesus in faith, that image of God is restored. The sin that obscured it is removed and the "God potential" in them is there again.

You see, when God made you he had a plan and a picture for your life. He sees and knows what he wants you to become. He never forces that on anyone, he wants us to discover it for ourselves. To be born again of water and the Spirit, and then to work with him and walk in friendship with him to make that potential a reality.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Cor 3:9

DAY 5

Read - Mark 11:1-10

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. v8

What expectations do you think Jesus had as he rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday? The people may have had wrong hopes, but Jesus made his intentions very plain.

Riding on a donkey, not on a horse, sent a clear message that he was the Messiah of peace, not war. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be the Prince of peace (Is 9:6, 11:6-9). Jesus was deliberately declaring that he was not a military Saviour, but rather a Messiah of the heart. When hearts are changed, true peace will come on earth. They would only understand this later, but Jesus wanted them to be clear that he did not want people to follow him for the wrong reasons.

The word "Hosanna!" means "save us", and it had become an exclamation of praise. The irony of this moment was that Jesus really was the true Saviour, but most of the crowd did not understand this. They would go on to reject him and crucify him because of their wrong expectations. But God would take the terrible thing they did to him and turn it into an everlasting symbol of salvation.

At Caesarea Philippi, when Simon Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus went on to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he would be killed and on the third day be raised to life (Mt 16:21). Jesus knew full well what awaited him when he rode into the city that day.

Ride on, ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die.

DAY 6

Read - Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. v1

In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens' famous novel, the hero, Pip, wrongly believed that his benefactor was a Miss Havesham, a strange lady who had shut herself up in her mansion and lived in isolation. She was jilted by her husband-to-be on her wedding day, as she was getting ready for church, and her life "stopped" at that moment. All the clocks in the house were set to the time she got the terrible news. But his real benefactor turned out to be a convict whom the young Pip had helped by giving him food when he was trying to escape. The convict was caught and sent to Australia where he came good and made his fortune. He never forgot Pip's kindness to him.

We often forget that God is our true benefactor. We wrongly suppose that our blessings come from other sources, like our own efforts, or other people, or chance happenings. But it is from God that all good things ultimately come, whether they come from our own efforts, or from other people, or from what seems to be good luck.

People often blame God for bad things that happen, or at the very least they ask why God allows such things to happen. I don't have easy answers to the "why" question, but I know that nothing bad ever comes from God. He is the source of all good. He may allow bad things to happen (the world is a tough and evil place), but God's will is always and only for good to happen to you and your loved ones. He is our true benefactor. And God's good purposes always win in the end.

Praise God from who all blessing flow