

**DAY 1 - (week beginning 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019)****Read - Isaiah 56:4-8**

*"...foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve Him... these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in My house of prayer... for My House will be called a house of prayer for all nations." excerpts from vs 6&7*

Palm Sunday, the joyous day when we celebrate the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem, is followed by an immediate "downer"!

Jesus is furious! In the temple there was an area called the court of the Gentiles. This was the place God had provided for the Gentiles who loved the Lord - to worship Him and to bring to Him their burnt offerings and sacrifices (Isaiah 56:6-7). Jesus was angry, because the money changers and merchants had set up their stalls in this court! The Ryrie Study Bible explains that foreigners had to have their money changed into temple currency because that was the only money accepted for the temple tax and for the purchase of sacrificial animals. Often the exchange rate was inflated and the prices of the animals was exorbitant. The noise, the crush of bodies and the smell, made it quite impossible for any devout non-Jew to spend any time in worship there. Jesus explodes in anger: "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers!" Mark 11:27.

What are we doing that makes it difficult for 'foreigners' to worship and draw closer to God? We have been challenged on this before. Do we draw 'outsiders' in? Shouldn't we be going 'out' to look for those who long to have what we have?

**Prayer:** Lord, please give me a loving, welcoming heart for those who see themselves as outsiders.

**DAY 2****Read - Isaiah 53:1-12**

*"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." vs 3*

Jewish people don't see these readings from Isaiah as a prediction of the Messiah. I have heard some say that this "Suffering Servant" passage refers to the nation of Israel and all the sufferings the people of that nation have endured. Certainly, Jesus' disciples did not understand.

According to Luke, Jesus warns His followers of His death three times: 9:22; 9:44 and 18:31-33. Each time Luke writes that "the disciples did not understand any of this".

I am not critical of the disciples for their inability to listen or understand. I know that I, too, hear what I want to hear and hold onto Scriptures that I want to hold on to. The challenge is whether I have committed myself fully to the Saviour I truly need, not the one I imagine for myself.

Jesus did not try to win the approval of others, no, He was "despised and rejected by men" vs 3 and yet, time and time again, I hunger for approval and affirmation. It's God's approval I need and this approval doesn't come from popular opinion, but it comes through Jesus and His intervention. I am saved and accepted because Jesus was rejected.

My salvation is not about my unique and selfish desires and ambitions here on earth. I am called to live for Christ and for His glory, remembering Jesus's sacrifice and love.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, please help me to see You as the VIP in the audience of my life!

**DAY 3****Read - Luke 22:7-30**

*"Then He took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of Me." In the same way, He gave them the cup after the supper, saying, "This cup is God's new covenant sealed with My blood, which is poured out for you." vs 19-20*

As we prepare our hearts for Easter, let's turn our attention to the events of Thursday, called 'Maundy Thursday'. Many see the Easter weekend as starting with Friday, but the events of that Thursday are deeply significant.

Jesus and His disciples prepared for the meal beforehand (vs 7-13). We, too, have been preparing our hearts during the forty days of Lent. Detailed and thorough examination of our hearts and our motives is so important. We ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. We know that God wants us to confess our sin to Him and renew our relationship with Him. I believe that Jesus gave Judas that opportunity during this last meal, but Judas's pride and stubbornness got in the way.

The "New Covenant" was instituted at this meal. The bread and the wine symbolised the sacrifice Jesus made to release us from the power of sin. No longer did mankind's salvation depend on their actions - Jesus paid the price.

Jesus also teaches us about servanthood. He not only washed His disciples' feet, but He told them that He came to serve and it is our responsibility as His followers to do the same vs 24-27.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, convict us of our sin and our need to humble ourselves. We are not even the slightest bit worthy, yet you show us mercy.

## DAY 4

Read - Luke 22:39-46

*"Then He went off from them about the distance of a stone's throw and knelt down and prayed. "Father," He said, "if You will, take this cup of suffering away from Me. Not My will, however, but Your will be done." vs 41-43*

This is such a famous prayer of Jesus': "Not My will, but Your will be done." What encouragement this has given us when we have had to accept something which we prayed would not happen! Having our faith stay intact when our prayers are not answered the way we want them to be, is a sure sign of "growing up" as a Christian.

Jesus wanted everything done the way His Father required. He handed it all over to God.

When I was a young Christian, Catherine Marshall's book called: "Adventures in Prayer" made a huge impression on me. Her chapter on the 'Prayer of Relinquishment' made the greatest impact of all. It was so important for me to learn that unless I give up my "self-will" (what I want) voluntarily, God cannot answer my prayer. This is not resignation - resignation is simply defeatist, relinquishment is acceptance. Catherine Marshall says that we pray: "I'll open my hands to accept willingly whatever a loving Father sends." What a powerful prayer!

Christ used His free-will to turn the decision over to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane and "power has been flowing from His cross ever since".

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, by an act of my will I relinquish my hopes and desires to You. I accept Your will in every aspect of my life. Give me the assurance that Your loving strength is with me.

## DAY 5

Read - Luke 23: 32-56

*"Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing". And they divided up His clothing by casting lots." vs 34*

If I hadn't already found so many reasons to love Jesus, then this statement, made at this most awful time, would have been enough! It is astounding that, in the midst of the ongoing rejection and suffering Jesus experienced and while nails were being hammered into His flesh, He continued to show love!

My natural reaction when I am being hurt, physically or emotionally, is to defend myself and to speak out - usually aggressively. Jesus, however, was not full of His own self-importance, He was full of love - "Love Divine". He continued, during the agonising hours on the cross, to think of others. He spoke with love to the believing criminal hanging alongside Him (vs 43). He spoke with love to John and His mother (John 19:25-27).

One of my Christian heroines is Corrie ten Boom. She is famous for having written many books including "The Hiding Place". She survived the horrors of a German concentration camp during WWII. She learnt to forgive the people who had inflicted untold suffering on her and had killed her beloved sister. She writes: "Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness." How freeing to learn to forgive!

Jesus didn't learn to forgive, the love which ruled His heart, made it impossible for Him not to.

**Prayer:** Free my heart from resentment, oh Lord, I pray. Teach me to forgive and fill me with love.

## DAY 6

Read - Luke 24:1-12

*"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" vs 5b*

The resurrection of Jesus is so important that Paul writes, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). And later he says, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (verse 19).

Dr Henry Morrison of Institute for Creation Research said, "The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. Everything else that was said or done by Christ and the Apostles is secondary in importance to the resurrection. If the resurrection did not take place then Christianity is a false religion. If it did take place, then Christ is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth."

The fact that Jesus rose from the dead gives us the promise of life after death because Jesus conquered the grave! It means hope of a better life. It means joy, not sorrow.

It is the most important day of our faith, it is central to everything we believe. The death of Jesus opened the door to salvation, His resurrection gives us assurance that He has broken the power of sin and death. We do not need to be afraid, He has gone before us and is preparing a place for us. Hallelujah! He is risen indeed!

**Prayer:** Thank You, God, for the amazing, life-changing fact that Jesus is alive. I need fear nothing, because Jesus has conquered the worst that Satan can offer. Thank You that Jesus is victorious and He offers me this same victory!