

Holy Week: An Unprecedented Cure



A Daily Devotional for The Passion Week
By
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Palm Sunday Through Resurrection Sunday

An Introduction

Today more than ever in our lifetime we are faced with an unprecedented crisis. Something that cannot be seen is ravaging the world as we know it. It is affecting schedules, jobs, education, health and sciences, home life, and causing death. Stable routines have been unhinged and new norms are being created. Priorities are being reevaluated and realigned. There is a new sense of urgency to pray. The church is being stirred to action. And yet, the crisis rages on. Our hope is that soon there will be an answer—a cure or a vaccine.

Many years ago, a different kind of crisis entered our world. At that time, it was an unprecedented crisis. It was something that could not be seen, but its affects were long-lasting and more damaging than the current effects of the virus. The virus was called “sin” and the result was death. For centuries, mankind has tried to “handle” sin. Whether through sacrifices, good works, religious acts, or some other means, we have learned through the ages there is only one cure for the curse of sin.

The message of Easter is an unprecedented cure for an unprecedented curse. Through Adam’s sin death has been passed from generation to generation to generation (Romans 5:12). It’s inevitable. Spiritual death is upon us all. The curse of sin is more real and tangible than any virus we face today. However, many still try to ignore the curse, living how they want, and not following Christ’s plan for breakthrough. Sadly, the results of this curse are still present today—imminent spiritual death.

But the message of Easter—the message of the Bible—is that Christ has come. The Deliverer has come to liberate those who call upon the name of the Lord, for they will be saved (Acts 2:21)! As you journey this week through the *Passion Week of Christ*, may you be reminded of each step in Christ’s journey, and may it be a reflection for the journey you are on today.

May you seek Christ—your healer and your Savior again in a new way this week!

Day One: Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, John 12:12-19

The Triumphant Entry! On the Sunday before Christ's death, He began His trip into Jerusalem on a donkey—the position of a servant. He did not ride into town as the conquering King, but the lamb that would lay down His life.

Zechariah prophesied, *Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden* (Zechariah 9:9, ESV).

Jesus became our burden-bearer. He came riding upon the donkey, but soon to be upon His shoulders was the weight of the world's sin. The crowd announced His coming: *Hosanna to the Son of David!* This address was to fulfill the prophecy that Jesus was the Savior promised through David's lineage. It was more than a title, but a fulfillment of what was coming. *Hosanna* meaning *save us* was a cry for deliverance from Roman rule, but for Jesus, this was about deliverance from the bondage of sin.

All along, the message of deliverance from sin was before their eyes. John the Baptist proclaimed that Christ was the *Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). Christ's message throughout His earthly ministry was one of repentance and of hope. It was a message that those separated from God could come boldly again into God's presence. The curse from the Garden of Eden was being destroyed. The account of sin laid against the sinner was being obliterated in Christ. Just as Adam's sin brought death to many, Christ's redemption would bring, and is bringing life to many.

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Psalm 118:25-26, ESV says, *Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.*

Jesus came in the authority and power of God. He came to do the will of His Father who sent Him (John 6:38). He came to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19:10).

Christ's coming into town stirred the city. Everyone, in town for Passover, heard the news about the man Jesus riding in on a donkey. They heard the stories of people laying down their cloaks and waving palm branches in honor and reverence. There were rumors circulating about the anger from the religious leaders. That evening, Jesus and His disciples spent the night with Lazarus (whom Jesus had raised from the dead) and his two sisters Mary and Martha. Oh, the stories that must have been shared among these close friends as they prepared for Passover and Jesus was preparing for His own death.

Day Two: The Fig Tree & The Temple

Matthew 21:12-22, Mark 11:12-19, Luke 19:45-48, John 12:13-17

The following morning Jesus returned with His disciples to Jerusalem. Bethany was only a few miles from Jerusalem, and so Jesus and His disciples could easily have walked to town. Along the way Jesus became hungry and found a fig tree that was full of leaves, and He cursed the tree. His disciples overheard it. The next day Jesus and His disciples passed this fig tree on their way to the Mount of Olives. Jesus taught about having faith in God: *Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours* (Mark 11:23-24, ESV).

From the fig tree onward towards the temple, we find Jesus drawing near to the city in Luke 19:41, and He weeps over the city, saying, *Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation* (Luke 19:42-44, ESV). What powerful words from Christ! He is deeply moved with compassion for God's people, and yet, recognized this powerful reality about them: *They did not know the time of their visitation*. A tragic statement, that the savior was among them, and yet they missed Him. Could it be that Christ is among us today and we miss Him in our daily routines? Could it be that He's calling out and weeping over our blindness even today?

Jesus and His disciples then entered the temple, and He began to drive out those who sold and declared, *'My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers'* (Luke 19:46, ESV). During Christ's passion week, He taught daily in the temple—the temple where He had just chased out the thieves. The temple where the religious leaders were seeking to arrest Him and murder Him. The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple and He healed them. He brought realignment to His house. Jesus was continuing the ministry He began in Luke 4, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...*

As you begin your week, reflect on how you plan to end your week. Jesus cursed the fruitless tree, wept over the faithless people, and drove out the fake religious people. It is time to uproot the fruitless and engage in the fruitful, to walk in faith and have nothing to do with faithless and return to the reality of the Gospel and not fake religion.

Day Three: Mount of Olives

Matthew 21:23-24:51, Mark 11:20-13:37, Luke 20:1-21:38, John 12:20-38

Jesus and his disciples spent their days teaching and ministering in the temple during Passover week, and their evenings at the Mount of Olives. Scripture is filled with teaching during this week: paying taxes to Caesar, the resurrection, signs of the end of the ages, the widow's offering, the coming of the Son of Man, and many more teachings.

That morning, back at the temple, the religious leaders were furious. They were upset about Christ's teaching. They were upset about the crowds being healed and ministered to. Now they wanted to know why and by what authority Jesus was operating. Their intent was to trick Jesus and arrest Him.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean (Matthew 23:23-26, ESV).

In Matthew 23, Jesus issued seven woes to the religious leaders. He told the people the religious leaders are doing their deeds to be seen by others (Matthew 23:5). It was confrontational. It was revolutionary. Christ was setting the record straight and liberating His people from religious bondage. It was during these teachings and Jesus' ministry that Judas Iscariot began negotiating with the Sanhedrin for Jesus' arrest.

The message of the cross is confrontational. Christ's message during the Passover week challenged His hearers. The religious crowd was confronted, and the broken and infirmed were healed and made whole. Even one of Jesus' closest began plotting to betray Him. Jesus taught that if we are to follow Him, we must take up our own cross (Matthew 16:24). Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice, but we also will deny our flesh, sacrificing it on an altar of worship to follow faithfully after Him (Romans 12:1).

As you read through Christ's teachings from the Passover week, take time to reflect on what He is speaking to you this week. The signs of Christ's return are all around us. Let us diligently prepare the altar of our own sacrifice and look up with great anticipation, for He is coming again!

Day Four: Jesus' Ministry

Matthew 21:23-24:51, Mark 11:20-13:37, Luke 20:1-21:38, John 12:20-38

Jesus' ministry continued the Passover week in the temple teaching and spending time at the Mount of Olives. We know that Jesus also spent His evenings with his friends in Bethany.

One evening while Jesus was eating at the house of Simon the leper, a woman approached Him. Before we continue with the story, it is interesting to note where Jesus was and who He was sitting with—a leper. Lepers were not allowed around the general population, and yet, we find Simon and Jesus spending time together. Jesus had healed this man's leprosy.

This woman came to Jesus and brought her alabaster jar of expensive ointment, costing nearly a year's wages, and she lavishly poured the perfume on Jesus while He reclined at the table. This was a dramatic scene of love and honor, and to many would have seemed inappropriate. In fact, even some of the disciples started interrupting the passionate display, saying the ointment should have been sold and the money used for ministry purposes.

Then Jesus says something absolutely shocking: *For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial* (Matthew 26:11-12, ESV).

This was shocking because the conquering king was now preparing for death and not a victory. Shocking because He has allowed this woman to continue. Shocking because the ministry many had given their careers and families to pursue was ending. Shocking because this was supposed to be the time to overtake the Roman empire, not succumb to defeat and death.

Judas had had enough. The heart of the betrayer is always revealed when passionate worship disturbs it. Are you willing to pour out your most precious, most expensive, most valuable upon the Lord? Maybe the sacrifice is your career, your family, your possessions...are you willing to lay them upon the Lord as a testimony to His burial and resurrection. What you lay at His feet in preparation for burial, will always live again through His resurrection power. What this woman did has been a testimony and will continue to be a testimony for us all to worship more fully.

We have a sign in our prayer room that says, "Worship like it's your last earthly worship." What would happen if we lived with the motto of this woman and to worship like it is the last chance on this earth before you step into eternal worship. There is an experience on this side of Heaven in worshipping the Lord that you can only experience here--the moment when you press through the veil of your own flesh and enter boldly into the holy place in this life. Once you step into eternity, worship will be sweet, but it will be different than the sacrifice of praise you offer in this life. Pour out your costly perfume of praise upon the Lord today!

Day Five: Passover & Last Supper

Matthew 26:17-75, Mark 14:12-72, Luke 22:7-62, John 13:1-38

On Thursday, things continue with a more somber feel. From Bethany, Jesus sent Peter and John ahead to prepare the Upper Room in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. That evening after sunset, Jesus and the disciples went to the Upper Room. The evening began with Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Jesus demonstrated the humility that every believer should have towards one another. Christ was willing to wash the feet of His followers, and we also should be willing to humble ourselves and serve one another. How might we this Passover week humble ourselves and outdo one another with brotherly love (Romans 12:10)? All the while the chief priests and scribes are looking for ways to put Jesus to death (Luke 22:1).

And he (Jesus) said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood (Luke 22:15-20, ESV).

Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples and instituted the Lord's Supper or communion as a part of this meal. As the New Testament church continued, this remembrance celebration continued weekly for the early church, as they celebrated the Lord's death, resurrection, and His soon return together. Jesus took what was known as the "Cup of Joy" during the Seder feast, and said *this* is the cup that is being poured out for you. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 12:2)! Jesus willingly laid down His life that I might drink from the wells of salvation with joy (Isaiah 12:3).

Today, there is an eternal supply of joyful drink in His presence. In His presence there are eternal joys and pleasures. Today, you determine which cup you will drink from. Will you drink your full from sadness and sorrows of this fading life? Or, will you drink the joyful drink of God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17).

Although the week took a more somber turn, and the reality of Christ's death was becoming more clear for His followers, today our week takes a joyful reality in knowing that Christ has overcome this world and given us a joy that no *one* or no *thing* can take away (John 16:33).

Day Six: Trial, Crucifixion, Death

Matthew 27:1-62, Mark 15:1-47, Luke 22:63-23:56, John 18:28-19:37

Good Friday is the most horrific day of the Passion Week of Christ. It is the final hours of Christ's life. We find Christ in the early morning hours praying on the Mount of Olives. His disciples are with Him but are easily led to sleep. The anguish and agony of Jesus' heart and soul are displayed as He begins sweating blood. Yet, being in agony He prayed more earnestly (Luke 22:44). He did not give up. He did not stop. He did not give in to the agony of His heart. He knew what was coming. He understood the brutality and hatred that was to be unleashed on Him. Yet, He prayed more earnestly!

Around 9 a.m. Jesus endured false accusations, condemnation, judgment, mockery, beatings, loneliness, and abandonment. His own disciple betrayed Him and then killed himself. His followers were demanding His execution. His disciples were betraying him and in hiding. He was sentenced to death while a known criminal was released. His punishment would be one of the worst capital punishments known at the time.

Soldiers spit on Him and mocked Him. They thrust a crown made of long thorns into His head. They made Jesus carry His own cross to Golgotha where He would be insulted, mocked, and nailed to this cross. The cross was then lifted into the air and dropped into a hole, causing the nailed arms and feet to tear and bring even more excruciating pain to Jesus. His back that was raw and torn from beatings with a leather whip formed with glass and rocks in it was now writhing against bare wood, nails in His hands and feet, a crown of thorns on His head, and hanging naked on display for the world to see.

Jesus spoke seven final statements from the cross.

1. *Jesus said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said the disciple, "Behold, your mother!"* (John 19:26-27, ESV)
2. *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matthew 27:46, ESV)
3. *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.* (Luke 23:34, NIV)
4. *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.* (Luke 23:43, ESV)
5. *I thirst.* (John 19:28, ESV)
6. *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!* (Luke 23:46, ESV)
7. *It is finished* (John 19:30, ESV)

At about 3 p.m. Jesus breathed His last on the cross. By 6 p.m. Friday evening, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the cross and placed it in a garden tomb.

Day Seven: Saturday's Tomb

Matthew 27:62-66, Mark 16:1, Luke 23:56, John 19:40

Jesus' body was laid yesterday evening in the tomb and it was guarded by Roman soldiers throughout the day on Saturday to ensure no one would take His body. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had taken Jesus' body off the cross, laid the body in the tomb, and prepared the body for burial.

Both Nicodemus and Joseph had come to Jesus secretly for fear of the Jews. Both were members of the Sanhedrin, the same group that had sentenced Jesus to death. Both men had lived as secret followers of Jesus, but now things had changed. They had gone to Pilate to gain permission to take Jesus' body off the cross, and now they were publicly displaying their honor for Christ. They even purchased ointments for Jesus' body and brought them to the tomb. They were risking their reputations and their positions but realized this was the long-awaited Messiah. Saturday evening, Nicodemus and Joseph anointed Jesus' body with ointments as was the Jewish custom.

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:18-21, ESV).

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Colossians 2:13-15, ESV).

There are seasons in life when it seems as though your hopes and dreams have been cancelled. The plan that God was working has stopped. While Jesus' body lay in the tomb, the plan of God had not stopped, but was continuing in full authority and power. The crucifixion and tomb did not diminish God's power or ability to bring about the eternal plan of the ages. The cross and the tomb were simply tools in the hands of the Master to bring about greater glory to be displayed for all eternity.

God is working in you a far greater glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). This momentary trouble is passing by quickly, and God will show His glory for all eternity. The tomb is for a moment, but His glory will radiate for eternity!

Day Eight: Resurrection Sunday

Matthew 28:1-13, Mark 16:1-14, Luke 24:1-49, John 20:1-23

Easter Sunday is the culmination of the Passion Week or Holy Week. The resurrection of Jesus is the most important event of our faith. It is the foundation of all our doctrine.

Early Sunday morning an angel came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. The angel looked like lightning and his clothing was white as snow (Matthew 28:2). The guards “became like dead men” (Matthew 28:4).

Several women (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, and Mary the mother of James) went to the tomb and discovered that the large stone covering the tomb’s entrance had been moved.

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you” (Matthew 28:5-7, ESV).

While the women were telling the disciples the good news, the guards also brought a report to the chief priests. The religious leaders paid the guards off and told them to spread rumors the followers of Jesus had taken his body. This is the story still shared today. The story may look somewhat different in some circles, but the message is the same: “Those Jesus followers are a bunch of fanatics.” It is great news that Jesus has risen, and it is news worth telling others.

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die yet shall he live” (John 11:25, ESV).

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him (1 Thessalonians 4:14, NIV).

He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: “The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again” (Luke 24:6-7, NIV).

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3, NIV).

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20-21, NIV).