

Week Four

Day One: Sunday March 11, 2018

Stripped

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows^[a] that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

John 19:28-37

Who was the witness that testified to the treatment of Jesus' body on the cross? Most speculate that it was John himself. But whoever it was, he was a follower of Christ. Can you imagine what the disciples and followers of Jesus were thinking at this time in our scripture? This must have been an incredible shock to all of them. Here was their Leader, their Mentor, their Friend and Savior, lifeless on the cross. A Man who had healed the sick and drove away demons was now hanging before them, battered and dead. They had witnessed this Teacher calm a storm with just the wave of His hand. Now His voice was silenced, and for all they knew, it was permanent.

Did they know what we know now? Sure, Jesus stated several times to them how He was going to die, in vivid detail, but did they listen, I mean, *really* listen? Some of them might have thought He was telling another one of His parables, and, no matter how many times He told it, they just couldn't understand it. Maybe they were in total disbelief that something like that could happen to someone like Him. Whatever the case, when this tragic event happened, they were scattered, in denial, leaderless, and afraid.

I believe, at times, we get that way, too. Sometimes our sin and our situations get so large, that they loom over us, just like that cross. We tend to believe that nothing can stand in the way of our trespasses. No matter where we go, that shadow seems to hang over us. And, instead of seeking

recovery and redemption, we become like the disciples. We go into hiding, denial, and seeking our own way out, when the truth is, that power is not within ourselves.

But we have the advantage of knowing the true end and the new beginning of this story. Our Solution is hanging on that cross. For between that cross' shadow and us stands Jesus, taking our battles and winning every time.

Brett Hyberger

Day Two: Monday March 12, 2018

Nailed to the Cross

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

John 20:25

In the midst of a world full of chaos, hurt, and confusion, when people we love are hurt or suffer, or when we see people in the wider community treated unjustly or hurt, it can be difficult to keep your eyes pointed towards the heavens, maintaining your faith, and growing closer to Jesus.

In our reading, it can be difficult to wrap our minds around how someone was raised from the dead. After all, our experiences here on earth are all we have to go by, and we have yet to see that happen.

Maybe that's the point! There is nothing logical about God. God is a God of surprises! God created the world and entrusted it to us. We are created to enjoy God and all that God provides. Life is God's gift, and life is about risks, relationships and learning to trust another person. Faith is the way of the heart; it trusts what another person says is true. In this case, that person is God. Even if we cannot see it, perceive it, or even believe it, we trust that while hidden from us, God is nevertheless at work restoring life.

Matt Peterson

Day Three: Tuesday March 13, 2018

Jesus Dies

Then **Jesus** cried again with a loud voice and **breathed his last**.

Matthew 27:50

Then **Jesus** gave a loud cry and **breathed his last**.

Mark 15:37

Then **Jesus**, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he **breathed his last**.

Luke 23:46

I can only imagine what must it have been like about 2000 years ago when Mary, John, and others watched Jesus dying on the cross. They still did not comprehend what Jesus had taught them; that He would be raised up from death and reunite with His father in heaven. What must it have felt like to Jesus, bearing the sins of the world? I can picture him straining to carry all that burden. I can picture him crying out from carry our load, my load. The grief must have been unbearable.

Today we live in knowledge and understanding of the bible. We have studied what Jesus taught. We have benefited from centuries of scholars studying and interpreting the written word. We can have hope, peace, and comfort in God's promises through scripture because Jesus "breathed his last" becoming an atoning sacrifice.

On January 22, 2018 our whole family was gathered around my dad at Erlanger Hospital as my dad breathed his last breath. There was sorrow and grief, but there was also peace and hope mixed in.

I know my dad's heart was right with God. I know my mom knows that too, and my brother and sisters know that too. We approached my dad's last breathe knowing that he would soon be seeing Jesus face to face. He would soon be free of pain. What a blessing to know that Jesus last breath could make my dad's last breath be less scary and more peaceful.

Lord, thank you for choosing to die on the cross for me! By you breathing your last breath, I have forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Amen.

Karin Stout

Day Four: Wednesday March 14, 2018

Laid in the Tomb

And after these things Joseph Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that He might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. He came therefore, and took away His body. And Nicodemus came also, who had first come to Him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. And so they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in that garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore on account of the Jewish day of preparation, because the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

John 19:38-42

I suspect that Joseph of Arimathea, being a secret follower of Jesus, had to be fearful for his life as he asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body from the cross.. Also how unselfish to give up his own tomb so that our Lord and Savior would have a place to be laid to rest. Such sacrifices made for our Lord.

I often wonder if I would have had the strength to step forth like Joseph of Arimathea and asked for our Lord's body. Or been like Peter and denied Him three times.

I picture myself standing outside of His Tomb. The final journey of His life on earth has shown me the meaning of His gift of Himself for me and you. This tomb represents every tomb I stand before in the fullness of faith in the Risen One, given by His own Spirit.

Prayer: Jesus, whose hands, feet, and side still bear the signs of this journey, to grant me the graces I need to take up my cross to be a servant of His own mission. Amen.

Olivia Greene

Day Five: Thursday March 15, 2018

Jesus Rises from the Dead

“When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He put his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the One who lives. I was dead, but look: I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and where the dead are.”

Revelation 1:17-18 ICB (International Children’s Bible)

To a three year old, the idea of coming back to life after death is something from a Disney movie. Anna from Disney’s Frozen had a frozen heart (died) and was only thawed out (revived) by an act of love from her sister. Our Father in heaven sent his son Jesus to this earth to live with us and teach us how to follow him. He then committed the unparalleled act of true love; dying on the cross. He chose to sacrifice himself for each and every one of us. He chose the pain, suffering, and even death; something so scary to us superficial humans. He died and was buried. He chose to wait three days, just long enough until death began to grin and thought it had won, to rise up and move the heavy stone sealing him in the tomb and walk out. To a three year old that would be a pretty cool movie. We would probably have to watch it on repeat. For adults, it is a pretty awesome God that we get to serve and praise every day.

Without this station, “Jesus rose from the dead”, we would be a pretty hopeless religion. Lucky for us though, we serve a God who is the first and the last, the One who lives with each and everyone one of us who believes in Him. Our God is more powerful than something that, for everyone and everything else, is so inevitable-death. They say the two things you can count on in this life is death and taxes. It’s easy to say death is a pretty scary thing for most people. When “it’s your time to go” there isn’t much anyone can do to stop it. Death couldn’t stop our God.

To think about what this passage goes on to say, to read what John saw, is pretty powerful. To think of Jesus coming over and laying His hand down on you and speaking to you should probably give everyone cold chills. It’s easy to see why John would fall at his feet like a dead man. Where it says that He holds the keys to death and where the dead are should give us hope. It gives us hope that we serve an unstoppable and mighty God who has no start or finish line. To know that we have a loving, unstoppable God that rules over death is gratifying. To know that Jesus chose to die for each and every one of us, to pre-pay for all the sin in our lives gives us a hope that there is life beyond our death. A hope that we serve the one true God who rules over everything, even death itself. Death tried to shut Him down, but nothing can slay our God, and He overcame death and rose from the dead.

- Aaron & Ali Grace Schwartz (age 3)

Day Six: Friday March 16th, 2018

Condemned to Die

From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

John 19:12-16 (NIV)

Every time I've read these verses over the last two plus years, I think of all the world's distractions when I read the line about not being a friend of Caesar. Prior to December of 2015, I would have been considered a friend of Caesar. I was saved while in college. Yet, I quickly strayed away from church for years at a time. I focused on worldly things. But in my world, Caesar was a bottle of alcohol and illicit drugs. I was very loyal to my Caesar. He had taken over my life. I can almost imagine hearing myself say "I have no king but Caesar." It is scary to think how close I came to losing my connection with the Lord. Nothing seemed more important. I struggled to maintain jobs and worse yet to take care of my daughter in the way I needed to. I lost relationships with people that mattered to me, including most of my immediate family.

Luckily for me, I serve a merciful God. He didn't give up on me no matter how many times I tried to make Caesar more than Him. He found ways to remind me of the fact that I had once given my life to Him; then I'd slip away again to serve Caesar. He would ultimately remind me who I pledged my life to one night in November of 2015 when He almost let me give my life away for good. Sometimes, like any other parent, the Lord must use tough love to bring the lost sheep back to the fold. I was definitely scared back to reality.

The reality is we need the Lord in our lives over anything else. I would have never broken the chains of my Caesar without giving my life over totally to the Lord and been willing to listen to what He wants from me. Since this surrender, I have moved to Chattanooga, found my church family that loves and supports me beyond my wildest imagination. I've attended a couple of good churches but have never felt this blessed to worship with my brothers and sisters in Christ. I have regained so many things that I thought would never be mine again, including a wonderful Christian woman to call my wife. This is why I will never worship Caesar again, the only King I worship is the King of kings, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jason Caruso

Day Seven: Saturday March 17th, 2018

Jesus Takes up the Cross

"Jesus said to all: 'Whoever wishes to be My follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in My steps.'"

Luke 9:23

Denying one's self and laying down one's earthly desires to encounter the very will of God can be challenging, but is the very action that brings discipline. To "shoulder one's cross" every day sounds so simple, and yet is so demanding. In order to do this, we must understand that we belong to Christ and that we live to serve God's purposes in our lives, and not our own. An act that is done daily can sometimes become a routine, and the meaning behind why we take up our cross can become lost in the monotony of its action.

To take up our cross each and every day, we mentally lay down our schedules, plans, routines, and desires; emptying our hands of what we hold so dearly, and allowing God to fill us with consecrated thoughts, actions, and plans. Do you seek your heart's desires to be met instead of the very Heart of God? "Are you willing to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow him? Anything less is not discipleship; it is merely acquaintanceship." [\[1\]](#)

Danielle Jennings

[\[1\]](#) *Life Application Study Bible. New Living Translation.* Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2013.