

Living Word Weekly Bible Study (April 10 – 15, 2017)

Monday: Mark 11:12-19

Throughout this week, we will walk with Jesus through the events of Holy Week. Each day's Bible study will cover the corresponding day in Holy Week. Today's lesson happened on Monday, the day after Palm Sunday. Tomorrow's lesson will be over what happened on Tuesday, and so on---right up to Holy Saturday.

This passage may seem strange; why would Jesus curse a fig tree? This is an important teaching, and Jesus needed to make certain it was understood. He knew full well that He was going to be murdered before the end of the week, so He had to do something that would get through to the people. In essence, this is a parable with a concrete example. The fig tree refused to do what God created it to do---produce fruit. All it was doing was making leaves. So what is Jesus' point? We see that in what happens next. The Jewish leadership was refusing to do what God created them to do, just as the tree was. They were corrupt and diseased, just as the tree was, and they were leading people astray. This infuriated Jesus---for the very people God put in charge of the spiritual well-being of His people were abusing their authority for self-gain. Both the leadership and the tree were bearing no fruit; they were not bringing glory and honor to God their Creator. This passage should really get our attention. Jesus is saying that a Christian who fails to do what God created her to do, who refuses to allow the Holy Spirit to work through her to bear fruit is cursed in the eyes of God. Jesus is exposing wickedness and showing His authority to do so. He is the Living God of the Universe, and obeying His call is not an optional thing!

We are the fig tree. In this event, Jesus teaches us that we are to bear fruit; we are to do what God has asked of us---not on our terms, not when we see fit---but now and all the time. We all have the choice to live our life as we please, but, if we forsake our Christian responsibility to do so, we need to know that there will be dire consequences. So, the choice is ours to live out Galatians 5:19-21 or Galatians 5: 22-23. The choices are ours: do we choose the way of God or the way of the world? The choice is pretty clear if we want to know eternal life. By God's grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can bear fruit, we can answer God's call---we can by our lives bring glory and honor to God our Creator and receive Him and allow His will to be accomplished through us. (Read Philippians 2:12-13)

- What are some of the key reasons that cause you to either move forward in Christ or move backward in pride?
- Are we, at Living Word, producing fruit-bearing disciples that are changing the world or merely fans of Jesus where self is the focus? In God's opinion, which one are you?
- How would you illustrate the power and significance of faith? What is something in your life that took extraordinary trust?
- Read Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:8. Why is it that without faith, trust, and prayer a Christian can do nothing - no growth, no fruit, no ministry, and no impact?
- Can you have true faith without radical obedience to God?

Tuesday: Mark 12:20-33

When they return to Jerusalem the next day Peter is surprised to see that the tree Jesus cursed has now died. Jesus uses this opportunity to teach about faith.

Jesus says that if we have faith, we can move mountains, which means that if we have real faith, prayer is a power which can solve any problem and make us able to deal with any difficulty. That sounds very simple, but it involves two things. First, it means that we must be willing to take our problems to God, and let God be God. In other words, we must take our problems to God and then do what He tells us to do! That in itself is a very real test because sometimes we want a problem solved our way and not God's way. Or sometimes our "problem" is us, and we are what needs to change. One of the greatest tests of any problem is simply to say, "Can I take it to God, ask for His help, and then do what He asks?" It is useless to go to God and to ask for His help unless we are willing to be obedient enough to accept it. But if we do take our problems to God and are humble enough and brave enough to accept His help, help will come!

- What causes you to turn to emotions and anger to face your present problems instead of looking at what Christ has done for you in the past?
- What examples are in your life, or that of others, that showed the results of true faith?
- How do faith and persistence balance each other out?
- How can you help Living Word become even more prayer centered than we are? How can you personally empower Living Word through prayer?

Wednesday: Matthew 26:1-16

Perhaps no name in all of the ages signifies betrayal and disloyalty more than Judas Iscariot. Judas was with Jesus from the beginning and the two of them were very close; so close that Jesus trusted Judas to be the treasurer for His entire movement. During our study tomorrow we will look at the Last Supper, and when Jesus announces that one of them will betray Him, not one person (other than Jesus) suspects Judas. It was unthinkable that one of Jesus' best friends would do such a thing.

So, why did Judas do this? In all likelihood, his motivation to betray Jesus was based upon his misunderstanding of exactly who Jesus really was. Judas had great faith in Jesus. And it could very well be that Judas was not really intending for Jesus to be arrested and killed. After all, the amount of money that he received for betraying Jesus was not very much---if it was all about the money then Judas could have done much better. It would also explain why Judas hung himself when he saw what was happening to Jesus. If he was merely selling Jesus out for the money, he would have known exactly what was going to happen to Jesus, so his remorse and suicide would not make sense. It could be that Judas was actually trying to force Jesus' hand. He accepted that Jesus was the Messiah---but he believed what most Jews did---that the Messiah was going to be a warrior king along the lines of David. He knew that at Passover, Jerusalem would be jammed with Jews, and it would be the perfect time to begin a revolution. He might have believed that by selling Jesus out, Jesus would be forced to use his power to overcome those who had come to arrest Him, and the revolution to kick Rome out of Israel could begin.

Whether this is the case, or Judas simply wanted the money---the fact is, he allowed Satan the upper hand; he chose his will over God's will, and he will forever be known as history's greatest villain.

- How would you respond if a relative of yours named their child Judas? Why would you respond that way?
- Why is a traitor far more vile than an enemy?
- Why do you think Judas did what he did?
- Have you ever betrayed Jesus? In what way(s)?
- What do you think about the fact that Judas sold out the Creator, the Lord, and Savior of the universe, at a bargain price, while a woman spent a fortune to honor Him?

Maundy Thursday: Matthew 26:17-75

Jesus knows that one of His disciples will betray Him; one will deny even knowing Him, and all the rest will desert Him in His hour of need. Yet, even though He knew all of this, Jesus seeks to be intimate with them one more time before His Passion begins.

When the prophets wanted to say something in a way that people could not fail to understand, they often made use of symbolic actions. We saw earlier this week that Jesus did this both in His Triumphal Entry and in the incident of the fig tree. At the Last Supper, Jesus is doing the same thing. All the symbolism and all the ritual action of the Passover Feast was a picture of what He wished to say to His disciples then and now. Little wonder we still do this every single week, 2,000 years after it happened.

The Passover Feast was an annual festival to remind the people of Israel of how God had liberated them from slavery in Egypt. It is not a coincidence that Jesus chose to give His life away at Passover. For He wanted all people to understand that He was the true Paschal Lamb. Just as the blood of the lamb protected the children of Israel from physical death,

Jesus' blood would protect God's children from spiritual/eternal death. At this meal, He was making it clear that He came to free all people from sin and death.

Jesus spoke of His blood being the blood of the new covenant. What did He mean by that? What Jesus was saying at the Last Supper was this: "Because of my life, and above all because of my death and resurrection, a new relationship has become possible between you and God." Because of what Jesus did, the way to life is open to all who choose to embrace it.

Matthew tells us that Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn, and then went out to the Mount of Olives. An important part of the Passover ritual was the singing of the Hallel. Hallel means "Praise God!" And the Hallel consisted of Psalms 113–118, which are all praising psalms. At different points of the Passover Feast these psalms were sung in sections; and at the very end, The Great Hallel, which is Psalm 136, was sung. That was the hymn they sang before they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus says that He will not feast with His disciples again until He does so in His Father's Kingdom. What better proof of Jesus' incredible faith? Jesus was going out to Gethsemane, out to trial before the Sanhedrin, out to the Cross—and yet He is still thinking in terms of a Kingdom. To Jesus the cross was not defeat; it was the way to true glory. He knew that although He was about to suffer unspeakable agony and death---He was on His way to glory.

- How could the cross be considered glory?
- Why did Jesus not stop Judas since He knew what Judas was going to do?
- Do you think Jesus COULD have stopped Judas?
- Why did Jesus choose to give His life away on Passover?

Good Friday: John 18 and 19

The Bible says: **"Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."** (Philippians 2:6-8)

Jesus' obedience to the will of the Father was complete---not even the horrors of the cross could break Jesus. The religious leaders were only concerned with their ritual needs. Thus, not wanting dead bodies defiling the Sabbath and Passover, they asked Pilate to hasten the death of the men on the cross by breaking their legs so they could no longer breathe. Part of the horror of the crucifixion is that on the cross, you would have to push yourself up in order to breathe, and this would not be possible with broken legs. As a result, you would quickly suffocate in your own body fluid.

The authorities wanted this done so they could take the bodies down and bury them quickly and not defile their holy day. But when the soldiers came to Jesus, they found He was already dead, so they did not break His legs and as a result, a prophecy was fulfilled: **"For the Lord protects the bones of the righteous; not one of them is broken!"** (Psalm 34:20) But, just to make sure, the soldiers thrust a spear into Jesus' chest, the pericardial sac was ruptured and water and blood flowed out.

Then, Joseph of Arimathea, one of Jesus' secret disciples, a prominent Jewish leader who feared what others might think, went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body and to place Him in His new tomb that had never been used. He and Nicodemus gave Jesus a hasty burial in accordance with Jewish customs. This was near the garden outside of the city wall. So now, Jesus is dead and buried for our sins.

In this passage, as humanity did its worst, Jesus demonstrated His best. The redemption and salvation of humanity were now accomplished, death did its best, and it wasn't enough.

Jesus was hung on the cross where He paid our debt of sin, suffering the ultimate punishment on our behalf. In Matthew, Jesus cries out, quoting Psalm 22: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” emphatically communicating the depth of His suffering!

- What is the most horrific thing you ever witnessed?
- Do you understand the necessity of the Cross?
- Why do you suppose the religious leaders were so jealous and hated Jesus so passionately?
- How does hypocrisy show insincerity and hate? How does this affect people who are both inside and outside the church?
- What does it mean to you that our faith is based on historical evidence, logical reasoning, and valid testimonies?

Holy Saturday: Matthew 27:62-66

Jesus was crucified, the most horrible form of torture ever conceived, inflicting the most atrocious torment and pain imaginable upon a person. Jesus willingly took it on when He could have easily walked away. When He was offered a drugged glass of wine that would have helped ease His suffering, He rejected that cup so He could experience death at its very worst. What we see here is the most perfect example of selfless love ever given as He paid our debt of sin. He chose to endure the most ghastly suffering a person could experience to protect us from death! Jesus models for us how to handle suffering and injustice and what is important and what is not. We must be set apart to be promoters of our Lord's Kingdom and Grace and to live a life of distinction, a life that honors Christ and motivates and encourages others.

The cross is pivotal for the real Christian faith. Without it, there would be no salvation---no possibility of eternal life! The cross is central to who Jesus is and what He did for us. The cross brings about our atonement---our “at-one-moment” with God. Sin destroyed our relationship with God, and Jesus’ blood on the cross made it whole again. This is the heart and core of our faith. There is no Christianity without the cross! Jesus carried the sins of those religious leaders, the sins of those soldiers, and our sins to the cross. One of the most powerful and beautiful hymns ever written states it like this:

When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died
My richest gain, I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

See from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did ever such love and sorrow meet?
Or thorns compose, so rich a crown

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all

- Christ is the One who gives us grace, forgiveness, and our life, purpose, and salvation; so how can you better display it?
- Can you describe the depth of Jesus suffering? How does this impact you and the call He has given you?
- How does the fact that our Lord and Savior died in your place affect you? Your walk in Him? Your relationships? Your ministry? Your work?