

7 DAYS. 7 WEEKS. THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

NO
MATTER
THE
BUMPS
NO MATTER THE BRUISES
STILL
THE
TRUTH
IS
THE
CROSS
HAS
MADE
YOU
FLAWLESS

- MERCY ME

D. DERRICK WEST

Anguish

You don't have to be an English major to know that word sounds pretty serious.

It means severe emotional and physical pain and distress in view of circumstances about you, in you or around you. Most go through life never experiencing what it means to be anguished about something or someone.

It is much different than concern. When you are concerned, you take an interest in someone or something and worry. Concern might even compel you to act. But most of the time your concern dissipates and you go back to watching television.

I am like that. You are too. But Jesus was and is so much different from us.

Anguish. Remember this word. Don't forget it. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever. Be mindful of that word for the rest of your life because that word describes exactly how our Lord spent the bulk of his last week. Anguish. Deep pain. Deep sorrow.

Without anguish, there is no Triumphal Entry. No anguish? No weeping for Jerusalem. No Gethsemane. No scourging. No cross. And no resurrection.

Without the Anguish of the Christ, there is no Passion of the Christ. No salvation. No devotionals. No church. No heaven.

But there was. And here is why:

"Oh how He loves you and me. Oh how He loves you and me. He gave His life. What more could He give? Oh how He loves you. Oh, how He loves me. Oh how He loves you and me." – Lyrics By Kurt Kaiser

Be mindful of that as well. Never forget that either. The love of God was the reason for the passion and anguish. Love. For you. And for me.

The Sunday Before Easter

There is a reason Atlanta is not a very big market for professional sports. Collegiate athletics? Yes. Professional? Nope. And here is why: when Atlanta professional sports team play on the biggest stage, they often forget how to play. From Lonnie Smith of Atlanta Braves fame running inexplicably off of third base to cost them a World Series Championship, to that other team in Atlanta called the Falcons blowing a 25 point Super Bowl lead, Atlanta professional sports are cursed. And we, the fans, have come not only to expect, but anticipate any team named Atlanta to lay an egg on the biggest stage possible.

That's called being an unashamedly "fickle" fan. Fickle means to change frequently, especially with regard to one's loyalty and affections. That's not only the nature of Atlanta fans, it's also the nature of all of us when it comes to God and the expectations that we impose upon him. Fickle.

We shout “Hosanna in the Highest” when He carries out our agenda for the world. But “Crucify Him” when He doesn’t. We praise Him like a king out of one side of our mouth. And curse Him as a criminal out the other side when He demands things like radical forgiveness of enemies.

But Jesus is so different from us. His entry into Jerusalem the Sunday before Easter was triumphant for two reasons. One, He entered as a king. That’s why He rode a colt. Solomon did the same thing. It’s why the crowd shouted “Hosanna.” That word means “save us.”

So Jesus said ok....and then cleansed the temple. They didn’t like it. So they killed Him. Rather, we killed him.

But second, a colt is a beast of burden. Jesus was a “burden bearer” for all of humanity, both Jew and Gentle. He wasn’t fickle on this day. Anguished is more like it. He KNEW that the fickleness of humanity is exactly what would change shouts of “Hosanna” to “Crucify.”

The gentle majestic and royal burden bearer stood in sharp contrast to the fickleness of human beings on this day. He still does.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Mark 11:1-11
2. Solomon used a colt to ride into Jerusalem at his coronation. The self and others professed Wisdom of Solomon accounts for a number of Old Testament Books and Psalms. But his wisdom was boastful and foolish. He didn’t follow his own advice to others and the kingdom split after his death. What attitudes and personality traits do you notice about Jesus in His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem? Why do those traits make Him worthy of your adoration? How can you model those in your life?
3. In what ways are you fickle in your devotion to the Lord and shout “Hosanna” when He answers your prayers and “Crucify” when He reproves you? How might such a rocky devotion lead to a false understanding of the character of God? What should be our attitude in receiving His answers and His rebukes? Why?
4. A colt was also a burden-bearing animal. What burdens are you carrying that you need to lay down? How will you do that?

The Monday Before Easter

We are an indignant mass of humanity. Don’t believe me? Wait for a parking space for three hundred hours at Wal-Mart only to have someone cut you off and slide right into it and you will.

Or get a note from the IRS advising you to phone them in order to discuss your tax assessment. So you do and can’t seem to speak to an actual human being. You’ll believe me then.

Or better yet, spend a whole day cleaning and mopping floors in your house and then watch your kids create mud art on them because they forgot to wipe their feet.

Indignant emotions roll in when we experience what we perceive as unfair treatment. As a result, we develop “self-righteous” indignation when we perceive we are being treated unfairly in a religious setting.

We often give ourselves a pass when we do this. Others? Not so much. We like to stand on a spiritual or moral high ground and become indignant when someone else threatens to knock us off of it.

Do you know what the difference between self-righteous indignation and righteous indignation is?

The former is an emotional reaction from within you produced when someone is questioning or being critical of you and/or your religious or moral perspective. You are threatened and therefore become indignant. I do too. That’s self-righteous indignation. Defending your moral, religious and personal “honor” and “integrity.”

You won’t find this type of attitude pervasive in the life of Christ. When people attack Him, He often turns the other cheek or says nothing. He knew who He was before His Father and wasn’t offended.

But what you will find in the Gospels is Jesus righteously indignant, or angry for the right reasons.

He became “righteously indignant” when His Father’s name was misused or abused. That’s whose reputation and honor He defended. Not His own. He was more worried about the Father’s name, glory and kingdom than His own reputation. Jesus is so much different from us isn’t He?

Someone calls your character into question? Self-righteous indignation. Someone calls the Father’s character into question. “Oh, that’s ok. We all think differently.”

Not Jesus. He was anguished over the lack of reverence for His Father’s name, glory and honor at the temple. So He cleaned it with a whip.

On that Monday before the resurrection, Jesus not only (a) cleansed the temple. He also: (b) cursed a fig tree on the way to the city because of Israel’s unbelief (c) wept over Jerusalem because He knew they would no longer exist because the Roman’s were going to devastate and lay waste to the city in 70 AD.

All of these events caused incredible anguish in our Lord.

But focus specifically on the cleansing of the temple this week because that’s the most significant event of the day in terms of how it relates to us. Why? We all have self-righteous indignation. Not Jesus. He didn’t care how He was perceived. He was more worried about His father’s reputation. He was much more worried about letting the Gentiles see the grace of God up close and personal. You see, they

couldn't during Passion Week because the "holy" priests and people were more concerned with lining their own pockets and building a building than they were with inviting the Gentiles inside so they could know Him personally. So Jesus chased them out of church with a whip.

Questions For Reflection

1. Read Mark 11:12-19
2. What makes you angrier: people insulting and attacking your character and/or your religious perspective or our Father's in heaven? Why do we care more about our own reputations than God's?
3. In what ways would you be willing – if at all – to risk your reputation for the sake of being a witness to the Father's character?
4. Jesus was angry at the self-righteous because their actions and attitudes blocked people from entering the presence of God that wanted to (like the Ethiopian Eunuch). In what ways does the church and do the people of God who profess Christ with their lips block people from entry? What will you do about it?

The Tuesday Before Easter

You've done this before haven't you? "I'm hungry for some Mac and Cheese. Since we don't have any, I must go to Winn Dixie. Now. I don't care what time it is."

You get there. Walk straight down aisle 13. Look to the right and see Kraft's Mac and Cheese on sale. Ten boxes for \$10. One problem though. You don't want ten boxes. You want one, maybe two. However, you think you would be losing out on a real bargain so you buy the whole lot of them.

You've done it. I have too. What they don't tell you is that you can buy one box for a buck. They make you think you have to buy all ten.

There are no victories for ole DW and Mac and Cheese at bargain prices.

That type of bad bargain doesn't produce anguish. But I know one that did.

Once upon a time, there was a disciple who looked spiritually beautiful on the outside to the rest of the disciples and to himself. His name was Judas. He's the last disciple you would have expected to betray Jesus. He always had answers for everything and liked to be seen.

At the Last Supper, the disciples had no idea who could possibly be the "one" who would betray Him. But instead of slapping Him, Jesus washed His feet. That happened on a Thursday. But He knew full well what went on this Tuesday that led to it.

Judas agreed to betray Jesus for 30 shekels of silver, the price of a slave in antiquity. That's how Judas viewed Jesus. He was worth nothing more than 30 shekels of silver. He was nothing more than slave.

Anguish on a Sunday colt. Anguish on a Monday temple cleaning. And anguish on a Tuesday for a bargain, a Judas' bargain.

But that's not the only event that would have produced anguish for our Lord on this Tuesday. Finding the fig tree withered would have done it. And so would the Olivet Discourse because that ends with a foreshadowing of what is going to happen to Israel for rejecting God on God's terms and also at the end of time for those who reject Him.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Matthew 21:18-26:13. What lesson, event or statement of Jesus He made on this day resonates with you the most? Why?
2. Read Matthew 26:14-16. Would you wash the feet of someone who knowingly betrayed you and maliciously hurt you intentionally? Why or why not?
3. What's the difference between forgiveness and trust? Do you have to trust unscrupulous people? Do you have to forgive them?
4. How do you know when you have sincerely forgiven someone, especially someone malicious? Why should you?

The Wednesday Before Easter

In his famous poem *The Road Not Taken*, Robert Frost ends with these words:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Wednesday is a silent day in the Gospels. Nothing happens on record. But plenty was going on behind the scenes. Two roads were diverging in a wood. Down one, Judas was making final preparations for Jesus' betrayal. He would have gone to the Sanhedrin and tipped them off to where his "savior" – oops I mean "slave" – would be the following evening.

But there was another road. All of the disciples not named Judas took it by preparing for Passover. They were making their travel plans and unleavened bread for the occasion.

Jesus was making His own Passover plans. One featuring himself as the anguished sacrificial lamb. That was the road He was going to take after all. And it has certainly made all the difference for you and me.

Questions for Reflection

1. What did the Lord tell Moses and the children of Israel to do the night before they were going to leave Egypt?

2. They were called to celebrate this event with a feast called Passover. It featured wine and unleavened bread. What event in the New Testament is similar in terms of sprinkling the blood of the lamb on the doorpost in order for the Lord's spirit to "Passover" and frees you?
3. In what ways can you celebrate the death of Jesus and His blood sacrifice for you in your personal life?
4. Why is the Lord's Supper so important to celebrate together? What do we miss when we celebrate the Lord's death for us in our individual lives but fail to do so in a faith community type setting?
5. What do you think this suggests about the nature of God and what He wants you to learn about Him in a community that you can't apart from it?

The Thursday Before Easter

I have a set of wrenches and sockets that are possessed. No doubt about it. Once upon a time not so long ago, I had a Ford F150 that I needed to tune up. Not a little tune up either. I had to change the spark plugs, air conditioner, radiator and engine coils.

First I took out the spark plugs. I dropped the wrench three times and it fell right directly in the exact geographic center underneath the truck all three times. Not to the right. Not to the left. Nope. The exact spot that makes it harder to retrieve.

Then came the engine coils. I dropped the socket this time. It fell right directly in the exact geographical center underneath the truck once again. Every time I dropped them, the Spirit of the Evil One moved them to the hardest place possible to retrieve.

So I developed Derrick's First Law of Auto Repair: Any tool dropped during an auto repair will roll exactly to that vehicle's geographical center. I learned that from my worst day ever on the job at Derrick's Garage.

I used to think that the Friday our Lord was crucified was the worst day ever for him from an anguish and pain standpoint. But the sheer volume of emotional anguish - from betrayals to sweating blood - gives this day the top prize.

Here's what happened:

- After sunset, our Lord eats the Last Supper while a fight breaks out about who is the greatest. Jesus gets up and washes all of their feet, including Judas. The anguish of betrayal? Check. The anguish of unholy pride and competition? Check.
- Jesus sweated blood - a sign of deep pain and emotional anguish - in the Garden of Gethsemane. And the disciples were sound asleep when their Lord needed a friend the most. Anguish. Deep pain.
- Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested. Anguish.
- While the Sanhedrin is convened, Peter betrays Jesus. Anguish. Deep pain. And the scourging, beatings and crucifixion haven't even started. Bad day.

Questions for Reflection

- (1) Read Matthew 26:17-75. Put yourself in Jesus' shoes for a second. What things would have caused you anguish in these verses if you were him? What would have pained you?
- (2) Have you ever sweated blood because you were anguished about the eternal status of other people? What does Jesus' sweating of blood suggest to us about how seriously our Father requires our obedience to see things the way He wants you to and do what He says?
- (3) Judas betraying Christ is one thing. But what about Peter? How would you have felt?
- (4) The text suggests that "all of the disciples deserted him and fled" (26:57). How would that have made you feel? Would you have done the same thing when faced with that level of persecution? Be honest.
- (5) Obeying the Father's Will and obeying and doing what is popular are contrasted here in the life of Christ. What human reward did Jesus get for being completely obedient (Hint: read 26:57 again)? What reward did YOU receive because He was completely obedient?
- (6) "If none go with me still I will follow." What's the difference between singing this and believing it in light of what you have studied?
- (7) How much does God love you in light of these verses? How much does He love people who betray other people? How much does He love those who are only concerned about lost people when they should be anguished? How much does He love the people who abandoned Him when He needed a friend and was sweating blood?
- (8) Love is a better motivation than scorn when it pertains to caring about the things God cares about. Explain.

The Friday Before Easter

God has an uncanny ability to use what seems foolish or discarded by the world to perform His best work. Remember this name: William Cowper. He was the fourth child of a British clergyman who was neglected by his father at a very early age because the "ministry" was more important.

Three of his siblings died, leaving him the only child of a father who neglected him and a mother who cared for him. Already traumatized more than anyone should have to endure, things would get much worse for Cowper.

His mom died while giving birth to a fifth child. The child didn't make it either. All of this happened before Cowper turned seven. And true to form, his father wanted nothing to do with his emotionally frail son so he sent him away to boarding school.

He was bullied repeatedly there. He loved literature and poetry, but his dad didn't care. He wanted him to be a lawyer. So Cowper pursued that vocation to please him. He failed the bar exam. And as a result, he considered himself cursed and threw away his Bible.

Cowper was committed to an asylum that a man by the name of Dr. Nathaniel Cotton operated. He was a committed believer and a lover of literature and poetry. He was the first father figure Cowper ever had and led him to Christ. And while recovering from his childhood trauma there at the asylum, he penned a lyric before he was 18 years old that you might have heard. It goes like this:

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath the flood lose all their guilty stains. – There is A Fountain Filled With Blood

Cowper went on to write more than 30 hymns and became a prolific author and poet. And some of his works are still used in grammar schools in England today.

Amazing isn't it? The foolishness of man is the very wisdom of God. And what the world leaves for trash, God picks up and crafts a treasure.

That is what happened on "good" Friday. The trials of our Lord. The scourging. The mocking. And, oh yeah, the brutal cross.

But, friend, the veil of the Holy of Holies was also torn. And sacrifice of the discarded, bloody, maimed, mocked, crucified and anguished Jesus makes it now possible to approach God personally with unveiled faces. For on that hill called Calvary and that rugged cross, justice met grace. Praise be to God.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Matthew 27:1-61; Mark 15:1-47; Luke 23:26-56 and John 19:1-42.
2. Jesus made seven statements from the cross. What are they? What's the significance of the number seven? Which statement means the most to you?
3. There were six trials of Jesus before He was condemned to the cross. What's the significance of the number six in light of the previous question? Why the contrast?
4. Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only love can do that. Explain.

The Saturday Before Easter

If you have been trained in music, you know what the word "rest" means don't you? It means stop. Stop playing. No picking. No singing. No high note. No low note. Nothing. Rest. Stop. Silence. That's what it means.

There is absolutely no music of any kind in a rest. But there is absolutely playing, picking and singing before and after the rest. Knowing when to play and sing and knowing when to pause and stop is exactly what makes beautiful music.

The same is true of God. He created the world in six days. And then rested on the seventh. And sandwiched between the great miracle of the anguished suffering servant who was crucified for our sins and the resurrected and victorious Lord Jesus Christ was a day of rest. And without that pause, the beautiful symphony that is

Passion Week becomes inconsistent with the work and character of God. But with it comes the greatest piece of divine orchestration in the history of the world.

Questions for Reflection

- (1) Read Matthew 27:62-66. This is the only thing that happens on Saturday. Why did the Pharisees want to make sure the tomb was sealed?
- (2) Paul indicates that people are “without excuse” for rejecting the Lord because He has revealed himself clearly. The Pharisees clearly understood His message or they wouldn’t have requested the tomb to remain secure. Why did they reject it? Were they religious or non-religious? What might that suggest about the spiritual condition of religious people?
- (3) Read Matthew 11:28. God rested from His work on this day. It was a day of Sabbath rest. Jesus equated salvation and coming to Him with rest. What might that suggest about how God wants us to understand our relationship with Him? What does that suggest about His character?
- (4) In what areas of your life do you need to do less worrying and more resting and trusting?

Easter Sunday

Anguished no more. Suffering no more. Up. From. The. Grave. He. Arose.

“So what, preacher!” “What in the world does that mean for me?”

Here’s what it means from a logical perspective:

If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn’t rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.”— Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*

Here’s what it mean from a practical perspective:

“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren’t true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks. You’re telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”— Charles Colson, *How Now Shall We Live*

And here’s what it means from a personal perspective:

“Our old history ends with the cross; our new history begins with the resurrection”
– Watchman Nee, *Love Not the World*

As far as the east and west He has cast our sins away. And up from the grave He arose. Through repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ, the cross makes you flawless. And the resurrection makes you a new person. And God no longer looks at you and sees the sin (though it will always be there). He looks at you and sees His son. Glory to His name.

Questions for Reflection

(1) Read Matthew 28:1-20.

(2) Which quote above means the most to you. Why?

So What

I'm convinced that all true joy is born not in concern, but anguish. Without the anguish of the cross there is no joy of resurrection. And that begs one final question: If you've never been anguished from the Holy Spirit to pray and be about the things God is concerned about (the lostness of mankind and our obedience to be His ambassadors), then have you really ever experienced joy and victory in your relationship with God?

The anguish of the cross leads to the joy of the resurrection. That's how He works in my life...your life and in our world. No matter the bumps. No matter the bruises.

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