*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

April 3 - 8

*Easter Sunday*

**Monday, April 3 Matthew 26:1-30**

*“She did it for my burial”*

 Jesus was at the house of Simon the leper, a man he had healed, when a woman came with a vial of very expensive perfume and poured it on his head. Speaking out of their materialism, and probably stirred by Judas’ murmuring, the disciples complained at the perceived waste, saying that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus’ reference to this being preparation for his burial is evidence of his awareness of what was happening in relation to himself; and he commended her deed, for it affirmed the Jewish belief that anointing a dead body was a faithful act before God.

 There are many questions as to why Judas chose to betray Jesus. He probably expected the messianic kingdom in a nationalistic way. Being disappointed when it became clear that Jesus was not an active revolutionary, Judas took things into his own hands to try to force Jesus to act with his amazing power. Having made his decision against Jesus, Judas sought opportunity from that time on to betray him.

*I accept you on your terms, Jesus, setting aside any false expectations I have of you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 4 Matthew 26:31-56**

*“Sit here while I go and pray over there”*

 Jesus led his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. Here he would wrestle in prayer over what was to come. Leaving eight of his disciples to wait, he took the three – Peter, James, and John – as a small “inner circle” to be close to him in his anguish, and he shared with them the deep sorrow that was affecting him. In verse 41 the statement, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” is no doubt a reference to himself. He was ready to do the Father’s will, but was wrestling with the limitations of humanness.

 Jesus’ three prayers are separated by his coming to the disciples for support, only to find them sleeping. The first time he reproved them; the second time he seems to have left them asleep. The third time, having been heard by the Father and strengthened in his resolve, Jesus returned to the disciples with a determined spirit. He was composed and ready to meet his betrayer. On a clear night with the full moon of the Passover season, Jesus could easily have seen the mob coming up the western slope of the Mount of Olives to take him.

*In times of trouble, Lord, I turn to you in prayer and you strengthen me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 5 Matthew 26:57-75**

*“It is as you say”*

 The Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, was in session, waiting for Jesus to be brought before them. What Caiaphas needed was two witnesses who agreed in order to bring a charge against Jesus. Finally, two are found who give the same false testimony. In the face of the false charges, Jesus refuses to defend himself. Knowing that he did not yet have enough evidence to find Jesus guilty, Caiaphas asks him the question of the Oath of Testimony of the Hebrew Constitution: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?”

 Jesus’ response, “It is as you say,” is an indirect way of making an affirmation, allowing him to go beyond their inadequate understanding of the kind of Messiah he is and declaring himself to be the divine Son of Man. Caiaphas had what he wanted. Shouting “Blasphemy!” (which means to act or speak contemptuously against God), he tore his clothes, a symbolic expression of horror, after which he called for an immediate verdict. “Guilty,” they responded, and sentenced him to death.

*You, Lord, are the Messiah, the Son of God, and I confess you as my Savior. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

April 3 - 8

*Easter Sunday*

**Thursday, April 6 Matthew 27:1-31**

*“They bound Jesus and took him to Pilate”*

 Pilate was the governor sent by Rome to keep order in Judea. The Jews did not like Pilate because of his contempt for their religion. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, tells us that Pilate had put Roman symbols of power in the Temple. Five thousand Jewish men went to Pilate and petitioned him to remove the symbols. Calling in his militia to disperse the petitioners, Pilate was shocked to see them bow to the ground and bare their necks, saying, “You can cut off our heads, but don’t desecrate our Temple.” Pilate removed the symbols.

 Considering Jesus innocent, Pilate was caught between the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the tradition of Roman justice. As a way out, Pilate proposed a trade. If they were concerned to not have their relationship with Rome threatened by Jesus, a man they claimed to be an insurrectionist, he would substitute an actual insurrectionist, Barabbas, arrested for the very crime they were attributing to Jesus. Following a Roman custom, he offered to release one of the two as a goodwill gesture. The leaders incited the crowd to demand Barabbas, and Pilate complied.

*Many will chose someone like Barabbas over you, Lord, but I chose you. Amen.*

**Friday, April 7 Matthew 27:32-66**

*“They crucified him”*

 The Gospels all relate the crucifixion with a minimum of words. None go into the terrible description of a Roman crucifixion. The major question has to do with “Who is this Jesus?” and “Why did he have to die?” At Calvary something was happening to God caused by humanity, but something was also happening to humanity and for humanity caused by God. Both of these aspects need to be recognized for us to think adequately of the meaning of the cross. The historical fact is that “Christ died.” The spiritual truth is that “Christ died for our sins.”

 This is the heart of the good news of the gospel. The death of Jesus wipes away our sin so that we will not have to suffer its consequence, which is what we mean by saying that in Christ’s death our sins are forgiven. The crucifixion of Jesus brought God and humanity together, for here Jesus made evident the depth of God’s love by absorbing sin’s punishment in himself. Further, the grace of God declares that forgiveness is available to all who believe in the Son.

*You died in my place, Lord, taking my sin upon yourself that I may live. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 8 Matthew 28:1-10**

 *“He is risen from the dead”*

 Matthew teaches us how vitally important it is to maintain a resurrection perspective on life. The empty tomb is a historical fact to which the angel pointed. The women were probably just as frightened as the guards, but as they listened to the angel and focused on the empty tomb, their world was turned upside down. They still did not totally get it, mixed with fear and joy as they were, but when they encountered the risen Jesus, it all started falling into place. They now saw who Jesus really was, and they fell down to worship him. Their Master is not just another religious leader or authority; he is the God of the universe.

 Our lives will be like theirs if we maintain a resurrection perspective. To stay fixed on the historical evidenced for Jesus’ empty tomb will open us to encounter him on a personal level, in which he is not just a religious figure but our Lord and Savior who is alive and actively involved with our daily lives through his Spirit who lives in us. This truth puts everything else about our day-to-day living in perspective – an eternal perspective.

*I praise and worship you, Lord Jesus Christ, for you are the Resurrected One. Amen.*