

Easter

Holy Week Devotional Resource

Easter is such a significant season for us as Christians and it calls us to return to the cross of Jesus, to deeply consider the price that had to be paid for our salvation and to richly celebrate & give thanks for all that has been won for us by Jesus. While we recognise that Easter can be a busy time, we're encouraging you to gather with us as we wait on the Lord together. Listed below are all of the opportunities that you have to gather & worship with us. Please do set aside the time to join us at such an important time of the year.

Holy Week Prayer Gatherings

Morning Prayer // Mon 25th - Fri 29th March

Church Coffee Bar

7-7.45am

On Mon-Fri of Holy Week, we'll meet in the church coffee bar from 7-7.45am to work through the devotional resource and to pray over our church and our wider community. There'll be tea/coffee and elders/staff members in place who will lead the session. Please note that these gatherings are open to everyone and even if you can't stay for the whole time, you'd be so welcome to join us.

Evening Prayer // Wed 27th March

Church Coffee Bar

7.45-9pm

Given that early morning's may not suit everyone in our church family, we're gathering to pray on the evening of Wednesday 27th March as well to facilitate as many people as possible. The session will mirror that of the morning prayer gathering.

12 Hours of Prayer // Sat 30th March

Prayer Room & Youth Room

8am-8pm

Then lastly on Saturday 30th March, we're opening up our prayer & youth space for 1 hour prayer slots for both individuals and for groups. These can be booked online via Church Suite by clicking on the following link:

<https://carnmoney.churchsuite.com/events/ifepyyd2>

Easter Worship Services

Palm Sunday // 24th March

Church Sanctuary

11am

We're beginning our Easter services with 11am worship on Palm Sunday and we'll be reflecting on the 'The King Who Enters' – the moment when Jesus enters Jerusalem and sets His face towards fighting the ultimate spiritual battle over sin & death on our behalf.

Good Friday // 29th March

Communion

7.45pm

Then on Good Friday, we'll gather around the Lord's table for communion as we come face to face with all of the horror / darkness of the cross on which Jesus died as the 'Lamb Who Was Slain' for us. We'll also welcome new members into our church family.

Easter Sunday Morning // 31st March

Carnmoney Hill Walk & Dawn Service

6.45am

On Easter Sunday, we're set for our annual walk up Carnmoney Hill. We'll gather in the carpark at 6.45am and walk promptly up the hill for a short service of worship, followed by breakfast in the coffee bar of church.

Easter Sunday Morning // 31st March

Church Sanctuary

11am

Then later at 11am, we'll be gathering for worship in the church sanctuary as we passionately celebrate the 'Lion Who Roars' – the resurrected King Jesus who is due all of the praise and the honour.

Easter Sunday Evening // 31st March

Church Sanctuary

6.30pm

Finally, we'll gather at 6.30pm for 'Resurrection Readings & Songs' as we reflect on the re-appearances of the resurrected Jesus, the assurances that He makes to us and the mission that He commissions us for.

Easter Prayer Guide

Theme

This year throughout Holy Week we're strongly encouraging everyone to devote time to bible reading & to prayer, either individually or along with others. As such, we've created this devotional resource which will help us to focus our minds on key aspects of Christ's journey to the cross, His great sacrifice on our behalf and our 'place' in the story.

This resource unpacks one of our key teaching messages this Easter: 'Jesus: The Lamb Who Was Slain' by slowly walking through 'The Lamb's Journey to the Cross'. As we reflect on some key moments in that journey as recorded in Matthew's gospel, this resource asks a repetitive question of each of us: 'Where are you in the story?'. The stark reality is that in every part of Jesus' horrific journey to the cross, we find parts of our broken, sinful selves present in the story as those who have all 'fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23).

Ultimately, it was God's merciful response to our sin & rebellion that sent Jesus to the cross and as such, it is imperative for us to locate our corrupt thoughts, actions and inactions in the story as culprits – abandoners – perpetrators. And as uncomfortable as coming face to face with our sin may be, these reflections will profoundly increase our love for the One who paid the highest price for us. As Tim Keller famously wrote, *"The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."*

As we reflect on our place in the story, our understanding of God's love will increase, as will our thankfulness for a Saviour who satisfied the wrath of God so that we could know Him now, be empowered by His Spirit and live with Him forever in eternity. So, let's journey together to the cross so that we might better understand and celebrate Jesus' work more than we have ever before.

Daily Readings & Themes

Monday 25th March

Matthew 26:6-16

Where were you at Bethany?

The Lamb Anointed & Betrayed

Tuesday 26th March

Matthew 26:36-46

Where were you at Gethsemane?

The Lamb Disobeyed

Wednesday 27th March

Matthew 26: 56, 69-75

Where were you at the Priest's Courtyard?

The Lamb Abandoned & Denied

Thursday 28th March

Matthew 27: 11-31

Where were you when the crowd embraced the murderer?

The Lamb Handed Over

Friday 29th March

Matthew 27:32-50

Where were you as Jesus died?

The Lamb that was Slain

Saturday 30th March

Matthew 27: 51-66

Where were you after the last breath?

The Lamb laid in Darkness

Sunday 31st March

Matthew 28: 1-8

Where were you at the resurrection?

The Lamb Raised to Life

Worship Resources

On each day of the devotional, we've signposted you to certain songs that relate to the passage and which will help you to spend time in worship. Links to the songs have been included on the digital resource – however, we've also created a Spotify playlist that will also help you to access or know more about the songs. Just scan the QR code below:



Monday

'The Lamb Anointed & Betrayed'

Read

Matthew 26: 1-16

Key Verses

"When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial."
(Matthew 26: 12-13)

Think

Jesus' anointing is an important moment which carries significance in relation to Jesus being the Lamb – the sacrifice for sin. At this point, the religious leaders were waiting for a moment to arrest and kill Jesus – so his death was imminent. And here at Bethany he dines with the disciples, Lazarus, Mary & Martha just days prior to Passover. Throughout the evening, one of the women lavishly pours expensive perfume on him as an act of extravagant worship. However, the disciples are frustrated with the 'waste' of the perfume. In Hebrew culture, it was common to wash the feet of guests with water infused with a little perfume. And in this instance, the disciples become annoyed as a lot of expensive perfume was used, which appeared wasteful.

But importantly, the disciples mis-interpret the situation. Rather than only being an act of worship, Jesus recognises that something else was happening here too – this was part of the journey to the cross. Here, unbeknown to Mary or the disciples, Jesus was being marked like a lamb ready for sacrifice – his body was being prepared for death. This harked back to Isaiah 53:7 *"He will be brought as a lamb to the slaughter"* and it was a striking image of the horror that was coming. In sum, these moments were among the origins of mourning & darkness in the Easter story; all of which were compounded by what followed next - Judas' betrayal of Jesus. These events occurred at this time and in this way to crystallise what was really happening – Jesus, the spotless, innocent lamb, was soon to die. Here at Bethany, the Lamb of God was anointed & betrayed.

Where Are You in the Story?

It's easy – perhaps even tempting - to read scripture as merely a set of stories written about God & other people. Yet scripture is much more profound than that and as we read it intentionally and 'let it read us', we find that God's word actually reveals parts of ourselves in the story. With that in mind, **who do you identify with at Bethany?**

Are you like the disciples? As in many occasions leading up to Jesus' death, the disciples miss what is really going on here. They've heard from Jesus himself how and why he will die. Yet, when his journey to death begins, they miss it. Easter is a busy time of year and as Christians, we sometimes approach it with a sense of apathy where we feel that we 'already know' the story and we just mechanically 'go through the motions'. Maybe this Easter, ask yourself if you're really seeing / understanding the gravity of the big picture. Maybe you need to seriously consider what the death and resurrection of Jesus really means. And maybe we all need to ask the Lord to give us teachable minds so that we may more fully "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and know this love that surpasses knowledge—that [we] may all be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" this year.

Are you like Judas? While some of us may well identify with the disciples here, we ALL are like Judas in his betrayal of Jesus. Judas' betrayal of Jesus ultimately points us back to our betrayal of God – in our thoughts, attitudes, actions and inaction. Our sin and betrayal is what sent Jesus to the cross. Sin had to be punished by a Holy & Just God and the innocent perfection of the spotless Lamb of God was the Only adequate sacrifice for our freedom. As uncomfortable as this stark reality may be, Easter calls each of us to come face to face with our sin and rebellion. And so, from the outset of this week, perhaps you need to consider again the depth of your sin and to humble yourself before God with a sincere and contrite heart.

Or are you like the woman? While parts of us undoubtedly resonate with the disciples & Judas, we should also resonate with the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume. This act was costly & sacrificial and as we approach Easter, perhaps all of us simply need to humble ourselves again and set aside time to extravagantly worship Him in this way.

Reflect in Silence

Take 5-10 minutes to be still and silent before the Lord and to ponder your place in this part of the journey to the cross. Perhaps you could write or type out exactly how you feel right now in a moment of contemplation, honesty and confession before Him.

Listen & Worship

Take a few moments to listen to these songs & to turn your reflections into prayerful worship – to do as the woman at Bethany did: extravagantly & sacrificially anointing Jesus with the adoration that He is due.

‘Here I Am to Worship’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eP7ptcozjwQ>

‘Alabaster Heart’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3To377DQZk>

‘Make Me a Bethany’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INQRxlvjYa4>

Pray for Someone Else

Think of someone or some others in your life right now and pray for them. Perhaps you could pray that God would speak to them significantly this Easter, that He would reveal the gravity of their sin and Jesus’ death / resurrection so that they might grow in their love & devotion to Him. Why not let them know that you’re praying for them too? Maybe the Lord has encouraged you deeply – so why not give them what you’ve just got? Take 5/10 minutes praying and sending the encouraging bible verses / messages / emails that you need to.

Closing Prayer

Finish today’s devotional by slowly praying through 1 Peter 1: 18-21 as a means of asking God to impress His word upon your heart & to remind you of how precious Jesus’ blood really was as the perfect lamb of God:

⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Thank you Lord for the Lamb who was anointed & betrayed.

Tuesday

“The Lamb Disobeyed”

Read

Matthew 26:36-46

Key Verse

“Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” (Matthew 26: v40).

Think

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was experiencing extreme inner turmoil & grief as He prayed for the cup of suffering to be taken from Him – so much so that his ‘soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death’ (v38). The extent of his heartache and anguish here simply cannot be overstated. But as is written in Isaiah 53:10, “It was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer [to] make his life an offering for sin” and in these moments, God says no to Jesus’ most earnest requests. These were among the hardest moments that Jesus would ever live through and where were his closest friends? Sleeping. And on the surface, we can sort of understand why they fell asleep. This was late at night and they’d just been with Jesus in the upper room, hearing some of the most profound teaching and sharing in some of the most intense moments of discipleship that they would ever experience with their Rabbi. So, in some ways, it is tempting to excuse them slightly. They were likely very tired.

But sadly, their mistakes here weren’t superficial – they were spiritual. In their final moments with Jesus and during his greatest trial, Jesus’ disciples fail to pray for him. And to add to that, their behaviour is outright disobedience to the repeated commands of Jesus. 3 times Jesus asked the disciples to ‘keep watch’ – to pray. 3 times Jesus asked the Father to take the cup of suffering from him. 3 times the Lord said ‘no’. And 3 times the disciples outright disobeyed Jesus’ request to stay awake & pray. How must it have felt for Jesus, returning from 3 of the most brutal conversations with his Father, to find his disciples asleep when he needed them the most? The disciples didn’t just fall asleep at 3 of the hardest moments of Jesus’ life, the disciples actually disobeyed Jesus’ requests when it mattered most. Here at Gethsemane, the lamb was disobeyed.

Where Are You in the Story?

There is only really one place that we find ourselves in this part of the story today – in the disciples' shoes. While it may be tempting to think that we would have 'done better' or 'done the right thing' here, the reality is that all we would have fallen asleep, just like the disciples did. Isaiah 53:6 says that "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way" and sadly apathy, disobedience and getting it wrong when it matters most is our fundamental predisposition as broken, sinful people. As difficult as it may be, we have to face up to the fact that parts of us are just like the disciples in this moment.

And as we reflect on our flawed position in the story, we also find that Jesus' command and example in Gethsemane calls us to remain awake in prayer, to die to ourselves and to humble ourselves to the will of the Father – come what may. Jesus' behaviour at Gethsemane sharply contrasts that of the disciples and this profound picture serves to call us all to a deeper place of devotion this Easter.

Reflect in Silence

Take 5-10 minutes to be still and silent before the Lord and to ponder your place in this part of the journey to the cross. Perhaps you could write or type out exactly how you feel right now in a moment of contemplation, honesty and confession before Him.

Listen & Worship

Take a few moments to listen to these songs & to turn your reflections into prayerful worship – to give heartfelt thanks to Jesus who bore the sorrow of Gethsemane alone and who constantly moves towards us and who loves us like no other, even when we fall asleep, disobey him and get it wrong.

'Jesus, What a Saviour' - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69m3X-DQxOA>

Pray for Someone Else

Think of someone or some others in your life right now and pray for them. Perhaps you can think of someone else who's story resonates with this part of the journey to the cross. Why not let them know that you're praying for them too? Maybe the Lord has encouraged you deeply – so why not give them what you've just got? Take 5/10 minutes praying and sending the encouraging bible verses / messages / emails that you need to.

Closing Prayer

Finish today's devotional by reading Isaiah 53: 4-6 and praying the short prayer written below:

*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Lord we thank you so much for the surrender of Jesus – for the anguish and turmoil that He faced down in the garden of Gethsemane in making the decision to surrender to your will. King Jesus, you have done what we couldn't do – you've been utterly obedient and we thank you for that. And so now Lord, we ask that we would follow in the obedient example of Jesus and that today and this Easter season would be one marked by courage & obedience to follow you whatever the cost.

Thank you Lord for the sacrificial Lamb who was disobeyed.

Wednesday

“The Lamb Abandoned & Denied”

Read

Matthew 26: 56, 69-75

Key Verses

‘Then all the disciples deserted him and fled’ (Matthew 26: 56)

‘Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all.’ (Matthew 26: 69-70)

Think

Following on from his conflict in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is arrested and tried 3 times: by the religious leaders, by Herod (the ruler of Galilee) & by Pilate (the Roman governor of Judea). And sadly, his arrest marks the lowest point for the disciples in the story. What do they do? They desert him and flee. Notice how their mistakes have mounted - beginning with misinterpretation at Bethany, then moving to disobeying in Gethsemane and now finally to desertion of their Rabbi & closest friend.

Interestingly though, Peter comes back after initially fleeing and he follows Jesus to the home of the high priest, where he waits outside the trial in the courtyard with the guards to hear the outcome. As he waits, he is challenged 3 times about his relationship to Jesus. 3 times the question is asked and 3 times he denies Jesus. The disciples collectively have reached their lowest point now, but Peter’s personal denial here goes even deeper now – and he knew it. Once the rooster crows, he is reminded of Jesus’ prediction that this would happen and in his grief he wept bitterly. Peter, the most outspoken and self-professed loyal disciple who publicly declared that he would never leave nor forsake Jesus, has done just that. Jesus knew that the court would forsake him, but imagine how it must have felt knowing that the disciples would abandon him and that Peter would outright deny him like everyone else. **Here at the High Priest’s courtyard, the Lamb of God was abandoned & denied.**

Where Are You in the Story?

Although we could consider others at this point, two characters/groups stand out as we reconsider our place in this part of the story: the disciples & Peter.

Are you like the disciples? Perhaps you've been a Christian for a while. Perhaps you've stepped out in faith, given your life to him and have been trying to walk in his way. But maybe if you're honest, when things have become hard and the cost of following Jesus in a particular area of your life has risen, you've walked away or hit 'pause' on prioritising and living out your faith in Jesus. Perhaps it's been in public, but for most of us, it's more likely been in a quiet compartmentalisation of our faith where we 'box' up that part of our life and tell Jesus 'I'll follow you this far and no more'. If that resonates with you, then maybe you need to pray this Easter that the Lord would fully expose the big and small ways in which you desert him in your daily life. And in so doing, pray that He would shine light on that darkness in your life and help you to give all of yourself to Him without boundaries and despite the cost.

Are you like Peter? Perhaps you feel more like Peter. Perhaps you've denied Jesus in some public way in the past while – in front of friends, family or work colleagues. Maybe your denial of Jesus isn't as firm or as brash as Peter's here, but instead it just looks like silence – never telling anyone of your faith and your love of God, but rather just burying it and keeping it to yourself. Denial looks like that too. If that resonates with you, then pray that the Lord would help you to know when that is happening, help you see opportunities to share and demonstrate your faith and give you the courage to do so. Practically, perhaps that is an invite to a service. Perhaps it's letting people know that you are praying for them. Maybe it's a conversation about the meaning of Easter in your office.

Reflect in Silence

Take 5-10 minutes to be still and silent before the Lord and to ponder your place in this part of the journey to the cross. Perhaps you could write or type out exactly how you feel right now in a moment of contemplation, honesty and confession before Him.

Listen & Worship

Take a few moments to listen to this song & to turn your reflections into prayerful worship of the One who was fighting for us at the very same as we were deserting and denying him.

‘The Heart of God’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp3--7Rj2R4>

Pray for Someone Else

Think of someone or some others in your life right now and pray for them. Perhaps you can think of someone else who’s story resonates with this part of the journey to the cross. Why not let them know that you’re praying for them too? Maybe the Lord has encouraged you deeply – so why not give them what you’ve just got? Take 5/10 minutes praying and sending the encouraging bible verses / messages / emails that you need to.

Closing Prayer

Finish today’s devotional by reading these lyrics of an old hymn called ‘Lord I Deserve Thy Deepest Wrath’ and praying the words below it.

Lord, I deserve Thy deepest wrath,
ungrateful, faithless I have been;
no terrors have my soul deterred,
nor goodness wooed me from my sin.

Without defence to Thee I look,
to Thee the only Saviour fly;
without a hope, without a friend,
in deep distress to Thee I cry.

My heart is vile, my mind depraved,
my flesh rebels against Thy will;
I am polluted in Thy sight,
yet, Lord, have mercy on me still!

Speak peace to me, my sins forgive,
dwell Thou within my heart, O God;
the guilt and power of sin remove,
and fit me for Thy blest abode.

Lord, I’m sorry. Expose the error in my ways. Help me to receive your mercy and forgiveness. And now as I leave, send me out renewed with your courage & empowering to do something to change and to represent you well to those around me.

Thank you for the Lamb that was abandoned & denied.

Thursday

“The Lamb Handed Over”

Read

Matthew 27: 11-26

Key Verses

‘When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!” All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!” Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified.’ (Matthew 27: 24-26)

Think

Following on from his trial before the religious leaders & his trial before Herod, Jesus comes to his final trial before Pilate. As in every other court, Pilate can find no wrongdoing in Jesus – he knows that Jesus is innocent. And yet the crowd, spurred on by the lies & slander of the religious leaders, demand that Jesus be crucified. Interestingly, it seems that Pilate goes even further and almost tries to advocate for Jesus. In his predicament, Pilate draws upon the governor’s custom of the festival where a prisoner would be pardoned and released back to the people. And so, he brings Barabbas & Jesus before them – two sharply contrasting characters. Barabbas was effectively a murderer – he was an insurrectionist and was absolutely deserving of death. And in presenting both to the crowd, Pilate probably thought ‘surely they won’t chose Barabbas over Jesus?!’.

But the crowd do exactly that. The crowd had become so deceived and their judgement skewed that they chose to receive a murderer back into their midst. Jesus, the perfect, innocent son of God who had only ever helped and healed harassed crowds, was now being betrayed by the very beneficiaries of his love. And despite Pilate’s own knowledge of Jesus’ innocence and despite his wife trying to dismay him, Pilate hands Jesus over to death in fear of protest & riot. How must Jesus have felt in this moment? **Here before Pilate, the Lamb was handed over.**

Where Are You in the Story?

Like every part of the Easter story, this exchange summarises the gospel. We are Barabbas and Jesus takes our place. Praise God! However, three other characters/groups also stand out: the crowd, the religious leaders & Pilate:

Are you like the crowd? The crowd that hailed King Jesus not so long ago in his triumphant entry have now been so deceived by the religious leaders that they demand his death. Sadly, deception is true of us – isn't it? Although it might not look like a public trial, we all fall prey to deception & the lies of the enemy. Many times we welcome King Jesus, but many times we reject him. Whether it's doubting our salvation, disbelieving God's word or simply refusing to live out that which he calls us to, we all are prone to deception in a myriad of ways. And in so doing, we find ourselves choosing Barabbas over Jesus – we trade good for evil, innocence for guilt, and freedom for slavery. It's uncomfortable, but it is true. Perhaps this Easter we need to ask for God's mercy in this all over again. Perhaps we need to pray that God would expose the lies of the enemy that we have come to believe. Perhaps we need God to show us all of the other worldviews and thought processes that subtly, but very really, war against His big story and work in the world.

Are you like the religious leaders? The religious leaders put Jesus on trial and fed the lies that swayed the crowd. And as easy as it is to think that we don't do that – we actually do this too. Think about it. Life is hard. We suffer. We struggle. We lose loved ones. We journey trauma. We experience the consequences of our own sin & the sin of others. And in dark moments, many of us put Jesus on trial. In the face of loss and hurt and suffering and seemingly unanswered prayers, we can slowly but surely make ourselves the judge and put God on trial for what is happening. Maybe this Easter, we need to pray that God would show us when we are doing this.

Are you like Pilate? Pilate is an interesting character. He knows what is right and not only that, but he has multiple opportunities to do it. But in the end, he chooses to do the wrong thing. As we walk the journey of faith with Jesus, there is no doubt that we do the same thing. We know what is right and we actively get it wrong. Our knowledge of what is good should be celebrated – that is the work of the Holy Spirit. But our choosing to do wrong is to be mourned. Maybe this Easter, we should boldly pray that some habits, thought patterns, repetitive sin issues would supernaturally die with Jesus at the cross. Maybe some of us just need to pray for forgiveness & breakthrough.

Reflect in Silence

Take 5-10 minutes to be still and silent before the Lord and to ponder your place in this part of the journey to the cross. Perhaps you could write or type out exactly how you feel right now in a moment of contemplation, honesty and confession before Him.

Listen & Worship

Take a few moments to listen to this song & to turn your reflections into prayerful worship of the Lamb who silently stood before the crowd that embraced the murderer in his place.

‘Blown Away’ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMLScl7_iBM

Pray for Someone Else

Think of someone or some others in your life right now and pray for them. Perhaps you can think of someone else who’s story resonates with this part of the journey to the cross. Why not let them know that you’re praying for them too? Maybe the Lord has encouraged you deeply – so why not give them what you’ve just got? Take 5/10 minutes praying and sending the encouraging bible verses / messages / emails that you need to.

Closing Prayer

As you finish today’s devotional, slowly read the lyrics of this old hymn called: ‘Christ or Barabbas: What Will You Do with Jesus?’

1 What shall I do with Jesus?
He stands before me now,
Wearing the robe of purple,
And thorns upon His brow.

2 Shall I release the robber,
The carnal man of pride?
Sin or a sinless Saviour?
O which shall be denied?

3 Solemn and awful question!
How still the balance stands!
Mercy a moment lingers,
It trembles in her hands.

4 Self on the seat of
judgment,
Dare you the world deny?
Louder and louder calling,
"Away!" and "Crucify!"

5 Not to the sinner only,
The question comes with
power; Hear it, ye halting
Christians, In every trial
hour.

**This is the question now; What shall the
answer be? Shall I crucify King Jesus & set
Barabbas free?**

Friday

‘The Lamb that was Slain’

Read

Matthew 27:27-50

Key Verses

‘From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”)...And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.’ (Matthew 27: 45, 46 & 50).

Think

No words encapsulate the depth of horror on Good Friday. There have been many moments of darkness in human history, but these are the darkest. The innocent, perfect lamb of God is humiliated & tortured. Jesus is in agony. Violence meets the prince of peace. A crown of thorns twisted onto his head. A scarlet robe placed on him to mock his ‘royalty’ as ‘King of the Jews’ by those who rejected and disowned him. He is beaten and brutalised, forced to carry a cross up to the hill of death. Nails are driven through his hands and feet. His side is pierced. He is mocked by passers-by as he hangs, gasping for breath, drowning in his own blood, beside two criminals. Despised. Cursed and alone. No matter what any of us may suffer in this life, no one can suffer what Jesus suffered here. On Good Friday, we simply come to stare at the horror of the cross. We should be deeply unsettled, and we must not look away quickly. Here at Golgotha, the Lamb was slain.

Where Are You in the Story?

Today is simple. Every single one of us are onlookers; among those in the Praetorium with the soldiers – among those in the crowds that lined the streets as he carried the cross - among those soldiers dividing up his clothes – among those who hurled insults as they passed by – and among those who stayed and mourned at the foot of the cross. Today, we must simply stop and stare and enter into the most uncomfortable, brutal moments of Jesus’ death. Pray that God would help you to look again and to more fully appreciate what happened.

Reflect in Silence

Take 5-10 minutes to be still and silent before the Lord and allow yourself to come to the foot of the cross. Perhaps you could write or type out exactly how you feel right now in a moment of contemplation and confession before Him.

Listen & Worship

Take a few moments to listen to these songs & to turn your reflections into prayerful worship of the Lamb who was slain for you.

‘The Lamb of God’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDte3axKH7w>

‘Son of Suffering’ - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umkNxoeHJRk>

‘At the Foot of the Cross’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTEUuiADlwg>

Closing Prayer

Today is about our response and so we won't pray for others. Instead, finish today's devotional by reading Isaiah 53: 7-12 and then praying the words below.

‘He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgement he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand...For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.’

Lord God, today on Good Friday we come before the horror of the cross. We are deeply disturbed and unsettled at the scene and we pray that the image of Christ on the cross would permeate our thoughts today – that we would be so aware of the price that had to be paid for our sin & rebellion. And Lord, we pray that you would help us to receive the gift of Jesus again today – a gift which can feel so hard to receive given the horror of what Jesus went through.

Thank you Lord for the Lamb that was slain.

Saturday

“The Lamb Laid in Darkness”

Read

Matthew 27: 51-66

Key Verses

‘Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.’ (Matthew 27: 59-60)

Think

After the horror of the last hours, Jesus takes his final breath. Darkness covers the land. The battle before the grave was now over, but the battle in the grave was now beginning. Saturday would be silent and the body of Jesus would remain in a dark, secure tomb until the third day. However, some significant things do take place after Jesus’ last breath before the silence of Saturday sets in. In essence, while the land & the Saviour lay in darkness, light actually begins to break out all around:

The Curtain in the Temple was Torn (v51) – The curtain enclosing the ‘Holy of Holy’s’ is torn, signifying that every human can now enter into God’s presence – not just the High Priest. Jesus fulfilled the role of the High Priest, dying on our behalf so that now everyone would come right into the presence of God.

The Dead are Raised to Life (v52-53) – The bodies of many ‘Holy’ people are raised to life and later appear before many in the city following Jesus’ resurrection. Not only is this mind boggling, but it prophetically points to what was soon coming and will come at the end of all things. Jesus’ death & resurrection is the first fruits of resurrection for his followers.

The Roman Centurion & Guards Come to Faith (v54) – As the Saviour dies and these events unfold, immediately people start coming to believe in who Jesus was and come to faith in him.

As the lamb was laid in darkness, light was already breaking out.

Where Are You in the Story?

Three groups stand out after the Lamb breathed his last. Which do you resonate with?

Are you like the Roman Centurion & Guards? Up until Jesus' death, it was clear that these soldiers saw him as an irrelevance and someone to be mocked – just another unfortunate public figure who had been turned against by the crowds and religious leaders. But following the events immediately after his death, they believe in him in an instant. Perhaps you don't have faith in Jesus this Easter. Or perhaps you've somehow lived like He is merely an irrelevant fairy-tale. Or maybe you know others who feel this way. Pray that the Lord would reveal to you or to them who He really is as you contemplate this passage.

Are you like the religious leaders? Even after his death, the religious leaders feared Jesus and his followers and so they demand that the tomb be secured. Even in his death, the religious leaders actively oppose Jesus & his mission. Perhaps you don't know Jesus at all. Perhaps you actively oppose him. Or perhaps you know others in that position. Pray that the Lord would graciously reveal to you (or them) the love that He has for us. As you oppose him, he lovingly fights darkness in your place, longing that you come to know him.

Or are you like those who cared for Jesus' body? Like the anointing at Bethany, Joseph & the two Mary's lovingly tend to the body of Jesus. This is one of the most beautiful moments in the story. When everyone else disappears, these few care tentatively to his lifeless body. When everyone else departed in discouragement, these few believed that Jesus was still worthy of their honour, care & sacrifice. Perhaps this Easter, some of us need to soften our hearts and allow ourselves to come to a new depth of honour and reverence at the feet of Jesus – sacrificing the very best of what we have to worship our sacrificial King. Maybe your heart is just cold to the things of God and this beautiful example of these few is calling you to a tenderness of heart. Pray that the Lord would do that work of softening and sacrifice in your heart and mind today.

Reflect in Silence

Take 5-10 minutes to be still and silent before the Lord and allow yourself to come to the entrance of the dark tomb in your mind's eye. Ponder your place in the story after the final breath when Lamb was laid in darkness. Perhaps you could write or type out exactly how you feel right now in a moment of contemplation, honesty and confession before Him.

Listen & Worship

Take a few moments to listen to these songs & to turn your reflections into prayerful worship of the Lamb who was laid in darkness.

'Sunday is Coming' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BalQ7HuPPJc>

'Jerusalem' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L T4J2RcbcY>

'Son of God' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVKdzGBVdwU>

Pray for Someone Else

Think of someone or some others in your life right now and pray for them. Perhaps you can think of someone else who's story resonates with any of this? Why not let them know that you're praying for them too? Maybe the Lord has encouraged you deeply – so why not give them what you've just got? Take 5/10 minutes praying and sending the encouraging bible verses / messages / emails that you need to.

Closing Prayer

Finish today's devotional by reading some of the lyrics of a song called 'Sunday is Coming' and pray that the Lord would fill you with hope, excitement & anticipation for tomorrow.

A great light dawns in Galilee,
Some say mad man, Some say King
Wonder working rebel priest
Jesus Christ the Nazarene

He knew well what it would take
To free us all from sin and grave
A perfect man would have to die
And only He could pay that price

So He let those soldiers take Him in
As His friend betrayed Him with a kiss
There before the mocking crowd
Like a lamb to the slaughter didn't make a sound

Then He carried that cross to Calvary
And He shed His blood to set us free
As the nails went in and the sky went dark
The redemption of the world was on His heart

Friday's good cause Sunday is coming
Don't lose hope cause Sunday is coming
Devil you're done, You better start running
Saturday's good cause Sunday is coming

Then He breathed His last, And bowed His head
The Son of God and man was dead
With bloody hands, Tears on their face
They laid Him down, Inside that grave
But that wasn't the end
That wasn't the end...

Thank you Lord for the Lamb laid in darkness.

Sunday

“The Lamb Raised to Life”

Read

Matthew 28: 1-8

Key Verse

‘The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.’ (Matthew 28: 5-6)

Think

Resurrection Sunday. This is the moment. Jesus, the perfect sacrifice for sin has been raised from the dead and stands before the women & the disciples, triumphant over sin & death. Praise God! Among the many incredible things that we can draw attention to today, note just one – everything in the Easter story has happened perfectly in accordance with God’s plan. At least 300 prophecies about Jesus & his death have now been fulfilled. And to go a step further, everything in the Easter story has happened in ‘3’s – the biblical number of divine completeness and wholeness:

Three times the disciples fell asleep.

Three times Jesus prayed in the garden.

Three times Peter denied Jesus.

Three times Jesus was tried.

Three times Pilate tried to excuse Jesus.

Three crosses were on the hill.

At 3pm, Jesus died. And three days later, Jesus was resurrected.

The list goes on and on. The perfect lamb of God died & was raised in perfect accordance with the word & plan of God.

Listen & Worship

Today is not about reflection. Today is not about silence. Today is about triumphant worship! The only place that we should find ourselves in the story today is at the feet of Jesus worshipping our hearts out. The worthy, victorious lamb of God is enthroned with the Father in the heavenlies and so get up and worship with all of your heart & mind! Here are some songs to help you do that:

‘Behold the Lamb’ - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIQRtxUF5o>

‘No Body’ - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPDmGctiYs>

‘Forever’ - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BopifSHEp8>

‘Living Hope’ - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-IfwZtKJSM>

Pray for Someone Else

Think of someone or some others in your life right now who don't know Jesus – pray for them. Think of others in your life who need to hear and experience the hope of Easter Sunday again – pray for them. Shout Jesus from the rooftops and pray expectantly that the victorious lamb of God will move in power through your life and on this day. Take 5/10 minutes praying and sending the encouraging bible verses / messages / emails that you need to.

Closing Prayer

Finish today's devotional by reading 1 Peter 1: 3-5 and praying that God would help you to celebrate today and in the coming weeks your salvation and glorious inheritance in Christ Jesus.

‘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, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.’

Thank you Lord for the Lamb who was raised to life.

Amen.