PALMS TO

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FROM

Devotions for Holy Week

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In the synagogue in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, explaining "that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead." Many people believed, but others rejected the good news, and mob violence broke out in the city. The angry crowd shouted, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:3, 6).

It was true. The astonishing events that Paul proclaimed took place during just one week—the week we now call Holy Week. The Son of God was offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He died and was buried, but the dawn of the first day of the new week would reveal his empty tomb. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the world was turned upside down—or better said, right side up—and now in Christ, we have the hope of life and resurrection.

PALM SUNDAY

Sunday Morning Glory!

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! Luke 19:38

ON THE NIGHT THE KING OF KINGS WAS BORN, THE HILLS AROUND BETHLEHEM ECHOED WITH THE PRAISE OF AN-GELS: "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE AMONG THOSE WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED!" (LUKE 2:14). Some thirty-three years later, similar words of praise echoed through the streets of Jerusalem: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Jesus, acclaimed as king, rode into Jerusalem to receive a crown. By the end of the week, the streets of Jerusalem would echo to a different shout: "Crucify him!" Jesus, crowned with thorns, was nailed to a cross. Through the death of his Son, God reconciled us to himself, "making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). Through faith in our crucified and risen Lord, our sins are forgiven. We have peace with God, peace that makes the angels rejoice.

Glory to you, O God, for the peace that is ours in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sunday Evening

His Words

... the people were hanging on his words. Luke 19:48

AFTER JESUS ENTERED JERUSALEM, HE WENT TO THE TEM-PLE AND CHASED OUT THE MONEY-CHANGERS AND THOSE WHO SOLD SACRIFICIAL ANIMALS, PEOPLE WHO TURNED HIS FATHER'S HOUSE INTO "A DEN OF ROBBERS." Then, in the newly cleansed temple, Jesus taught the eagerly listening crowds. Jesus' enemies wanted to arrest and destroy him, but they were unable to act against him because they feared the people, who were hanging on Jesus' every word. Soon it would be time for the Savior to die, but not yet.

We may be spending more time than usual in our Father's house as we attend the many special worship services offered during this Holy Week. With hearts cleansed from sin by the blood of our Savior and nourished in faith by his holy Supper, we will have many opportunities to hear the Word of the Lord. Like those earliest followers who so gladly heard the Savior, we too will hang on his every word.

> Lord, cleanse our hearts of sin and lead us to cling to your Word. Amen.

Monday Morning

Cornerstone

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. *Luke 20:17*

TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE, JESUS TOLD A PARABLE ABOUT A LANDOWNER AND A VINEYARD, A VINEYARD THAT WAS ISRAEL (ISAIAH 5:7). God, the landowner, planted his people in the promised land, expecting them to bear fruit to his glory. He sent his prophets to gather this fruit of faith, but unfaithful tenants, the religious leaders who were to manage the property of the Lord, mistreated his servants and sent them away emptyhanded. Finally, the divine landowner said, "I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." The Son came, and was met with rejection, not respect.

By the end of the week, the unfaithful tenants would succeed in their plan to murder the landowner's beloved Son. But the Son, thrown out like a broken stone from a vineyard wall, would be raised up as the cornerstone and foundation of our hope. Now by faith in the Son of God, we who are the landowner's vineyard bear fruit to his glory.

Jesus our Cornerstone, our hope rests firmly and securely on you alone. Amen.

Monday Evening

The Image of God

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. *Luke 20:25*

THE SCRIBES AND CHIEF PRIESTS RECOGNIZED THEM-SELVES AS THE UNFAITHFUL TENANTS OF JESUS' PARABLE, BUT THEY STILL REJECTED THE SON. They sent spies to trap Jesus into speaking against the rule of Rome, an offense deserving death. In pretended innocence, the spies asked, "Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar?" Jesus was ready for them. The coin for the tax bore the image of Caesar, so the coin belonged to Caesar. All things, including the people who bear his image, belong to God the Creator. The astonished spies had no response.

The image of God in us, an image of holiness and righteousness, was lost to sinful pride in our rebellion against our Creator. But we are created anew through faith and "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Romans 8:29), who is himself "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

Lord Jesus, we are created anew in your image. We are yours, bought with your precious blood. Amen.



Tuesday Morning

Living

He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him. *Luke 20:38*

THE SADDUCEES ASKED JESUS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD ON JUDGMENT DAY, EVEN THOUGH THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THERE WOULD ACTUALLY BE A RESURREC-TION. They quoted Moses, and Jesus quoted Moses right back to them. Moses testified that the God who spoke from the burning bush called himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even the Sadducees had to admit that these great men of faith lived in God's presence. God is the God of the living.

Jesus knew all about the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day, because he himself is the source of life and resurrection (John 11:25). Soon he would die and be buried. On the first day of the new week, he would be the first to rise from the dead but not the last. The God of the living will one day raise us up just as he raised his Son.

Lord, you are the foundation of our hope of life and resurrection. Amen.

Tuesday Evening

More Than All

... she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on. *Luke 21:4*

IN THE TEMPLE, JESUS WATCHED PEOPLE PUTTING THEIR GIFTS IN THE OFFERING BOX. He saw wealthy people put in large amounts of money, and he looked on as a poor widow contributed only two small copper coins. Yet she, Jesus said, gave more than all of them. The wealthy gave only a portion of all they owned. The widow "out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Soon Jesus, too, would give more than all. The eternal Son of God, rich in divine majesty and power, laid aside his glory to be born among us. He carried our sins in his body to the cross, suffering the penalty of death in our place. His blood purchased for us the overflowing wealth of forgiveness and eternal life. "For your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Lord Jesus, you gave more than all, laying down your life for our salvation. Amen.



Wednesday Morning

Opportunity

This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Luke 21:13

JESUS' DISCIPLES, ADMIRING THE BEAUTIFUL TEMPLE, WERE ASTONISHED TO HEAR THE LORD SAY THAT ITS CAREFULLY CRAFTED STONES WOULD BE TORN DOWN. They asked, "When will these things be?" Times of terror are coming, Jesus warned. False prophets will come in his name. Nations will go to war. There will be earthquakes, famine and disease.

Terror will strike, up close and personal. As Jesus' followers, we will be persecuted because of our faith. We may be arrested and tried before kings and governors, but those trials are opportunities for witness. The Lord himself will give us the wisdom to proclaim the truth of the Gospel. Not one of the hairs on our heads would perish, those hairs so carefully numbered by God (Luke 12:7). We will be given the strength to endure, and we have our Lord's promise: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Lord, fill us with hope and make us confident and faithful witnesses for you. Amen.

Wednesday Evening

Straighten Up

When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. *Luke 21:28*

"THE WHOLE CREATION HAS BEEN GROANING" AS IT AN-TICIPATES THE DAY OF JUDGMENT (ROMANS 8:22). The terrifying signs in the skies, the distress among nations and the roaring sea are enough to send people into hiding, terrified of what is happening in the world. But there will be no place to hide when Jesus returns to judge the nations.

When we see the trees begin to fill with leaves each spring, we know that summer is almost here. In the same way, when we see and hear of terrifying events, we know that Jesus is almost here. This is no time to hide. It is time to stand up tall and raise our heads because our Lord is coming back. He has promised it, and we can trust him on that. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Luke 21:33).

Lord Jesus, we wait and watch for your return. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.



Thursday Morning

Covenant

This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. *Luke 22:20*

GOD DELIVERED HIS PEOPLE FROM SLAVERY, DESTROYING THE FIRSTBORN OF EGYPT AS DEATH PASSED OVER THE ISRAELITE DOORS MARKED WITH THE BLOOD OF LAMBS. God made a covenant with his people, and even though they disobeyed him and broke the covenant, God keeps his promises. He declared, "I will make a new covenant ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:31, 34).

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover. With the bread and wine, Jesus gave to them, and to us, his body and blood. Taking the cup, Jesus said, "This cup that is poured out is the new covenant in my blood." The next day, the precious blood of the Lamb of God was poured out on the cross. The covenant was kept. Our sins are forgiven.

Lord Jesus, we give thanks for the gift of your body and blood, given and shed for us. Amen.

Thursday Evening

Not My Will

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done. *Luke 22:42*

IN THE PASSOVER CELEBRATION, JESUS MAY HAVE RECITED THESE WORDS: "THE SNARES OF DEATH ENCOMPASSED ME ... I SUFFERED DISTRESS AND ANGUISH. Then I called on the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!'" (Psalm 116:3-4) Then in Gethsemane, his anguish so great that his sweat fell like drops of blood, Jesus asked his Father to deliver him, to remove the terrible cup of suffering that he must soon drink. Yet Jesus also prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

It was his Father's will that Jesus drink that cup. On the cross, Jesus suffered the penalty of death in our place, the death that was the wages we earned by our sin (Romans 6:23). He drained the cup of divine wrath against sin so that we will never have to drink from it. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). That was the Father's will, and it was done.

Lord, may your will be done in our lives. Amen.

Friday Morning

One Voice

They were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. *Luke 23:23*

JESUS WAS BETRAYED, ARRESTED AND CONDEMNED TO DEATH BY THE JEWISH RULING COUNCIL. BECAUSE THEY DID NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO EXECUTE HIM, JESUS WAS TAKEN BEFORE PILATE, THE ROMAN GOVERNOR. But after listening to the accusations and examining the prisoner, Pilate found him innocent of the charges brought against him. Still the crowd shouted, "Crucify him!" They continued to cry out all the more for Jesus' death, and in the end, their voices prevailed. Pilate gave the order, and Jesus was led away to be crucified.

In repentant sorrow, we admit that often our voices, too, are raised against our Lord. For all of our sins—of voice and mind and heart and hand—Jesus took up his cross. Many voices were raised against the Savior, but at the cross, one voice prevailed. Jesus cried out, "It is finished," and the debt we owed for our sins was paid in full.

> Lord Jesus, help us to listen to your voice in your holy Word. Amen.

Friday Evening

Access

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit! Luke 23:46

JESUS WAS LED TO THE EXECUTION SITE AND NAILED TO THE CROSS. HANGING THERE, HE ENDURED THE RIDICULE OF THE RULERS, THE SOLDIERS AND THOSE PASSING BY. He did not respond in kind. He prayed for his tormentors and promised paradise to the repentant thief who hung beside him. For his last hours on the cross, the Light of the world hung in darkness as the sun's light failed.

Finally, his work of redemption complete, Jesus cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" He breathed his last. The temple curtain veiling the presence of God was torn in two, to be replaced by the new, living curtain of Jesus' flesh, through which we now have access to the throne of God (Hebrews 10:20). With the quiet peace that comes only through the forgiveness of sins, we pray: "Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God" (Psalm 31:5).

Heavenly Father, we commit ourselves into your care, now and for all eternity. Amen.

Saturday Morning

The King

He was looking for the kingdom of God. Luke 23:51

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA WAS A "GOOD AND RIGHTEOUS MAN." HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE JEWISH RULING COUNCIL, BUT HE HAD NOT AGREED TO THE ACTION TAKEN AGAINST JESUS. This good man went to Pilate and received permission to take Jesus' body down from the cross. Because the Sabbath would soon begin, Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in a linen shroud and laid him in a nearby tomb, Joseph's own tomb.

Joseph "was looking for the kingdom of God." He very likely did not yet understand that what looked like defeat for his King was in reality a victory. Jesus suffered and died so that "through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). Joseph clothed the body of the conquering King, not in royal robes, but in a linen shroud that became stained with blood: blood shed to free us from our slavery to sin and death, blood shed to win the kingdom. Very soon, the King of kings would take up his throne.

Jesus our King, reign over us now and always. Amen.

Saturday Evening

Hope

We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. *Luke 24:21*

WHEN GOOD FRIDAY WAS PAST, AND THE SABBATH WAS OVER, TWO MEN WHO HAD FOLLOWED JESUS WALKED FROM JERUSALEM TO NEARBY EMMAUS. On the way, they discussed recent events—and lost hope—as a third traveler joined in their conversation. Jesus of Nazareth, the men explained, had been condemned and crucified. They had been so sure he was the Messiah. They had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel. But now their hope was dead and gone, sealed in a tomb. Yes, they had heard strange reports. Women went to the tomb and found it empty. Angels had spoken to them. The two men didn't understand what was going on, but their fellow traveler was about to explain it all to them. Of course, these events took place on Sunday. Holy Saturday was still a day of mourning, of waiting and wondering. But in just a few more hours, everything would change—forever.

Lord Jesus, in you alone we have the certain hope of life and resurrection. Amen.

FROM PALMS TO PASSION Devotions for Holy Week

It all happened in one week, the seven days we now call Holy Week. God's plan of salvation, set in motion so long ago, was accomplished. The Son of God fulfilled the purpose for which he had come. The Lamb of God was sacrificed for the sins of the world, for our sins. With these devotions, follow Jesus through the astonishing events that took place in one week From Palms to Passion.

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