

Reflections
on the
Crucifixion



Weekly Devotions
for Lent

⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶ So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

⁹ God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. ¹⁰ And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. ¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

¹² God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. ¹³ And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. ¹⁴ The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

Ephesians 1:4-14 NLT

The last moments leading up to Jesus' death were not left up to chance. God chose the path; he selected the nails. Our Lord planted the trio of crosses and painted the sign. God was never more sovereign than in the details of the death of his Son. And in those details are gifts Christ provided for us...the cross. The thorns. The nails. His seamless robe. The empty tomb.

Experience Lent as a time not to just give up something, but to prepare to receive good gifts from God.

Take comfort that Jesus understands everything you face in this life.

Receive the grace of Christ's work for us.

Stand firm in the promise that you are forgiven

Search the scene of the cross and hear God whisper,

“I did it just for you.”

Week 1:

God's Promise in

Jesus' Robe



*Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace; and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. **Mark 15:16-20***

The death sentence isn't enough for the soldiers. Why? The purple robe and mocking salute, "Hail, King of the Jews!" aren't meant to cause physical pain. They are meant to degrade and humiliate.

Roman soldiers were not exactly at the top of political power. Rather, they were tools used by the elite to maintain their power. In the eyes of emperors, governors, senators, and the wealthiest Romans, soldiers had a low station. The soldiers knew they were expendable to those in charge.

To feel a bit higher, Roman soldiers often harassed, extorted, and humiliated the peoples whose lands they occupied. They made themselves higher by make others lower. Have you ever done that? Maybe you haven't openly mocked or abused others. But have you spoken unkind words? Taken part in hurtful gossip? Torn down a coworker to get ahead? *"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me."*
Matthew 25:40.

This is the nature of sin. Our very own sinful nature. *"I did not hide my face from insult and spitting."* **Isaiah 50:6.** Jesus accepts our sin and carries it to the Cross. The sinless One takes on our sin so we may be made clean.

Pray: *Jesus, help me to recognize my sin. Make me aware of the impact my words and actions have on others. Guide me to build others up, rather than tearing them down. Help me to put on the robe of repentance. Amen.*

Week 2:

God's Promise in the

Crown of Thorns



Thorns and snares are in path of the wicked... **Proverbs 22:5**

You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? **Matthew 7:16**

...and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' **Matthew 27:29**

The Roman soldiers continued to mock and humiliate Jesus. They took direct aim at his supposed crime: being the King of the Jews. Taking branches from a young rose bush, they twisted them into a crown and placed it on his head. This brought both physical, emotional, and spiritual pain.

Throughout Scriptures, thorns represent the consequences of sin. In Genesis, God told Adam he would have to toil to farm the land filled with thorns because he disobeyed God. Isaiah told how Israel was laid waste and filled with thorns as the Israelites were sent into exile because of their sins.

Although the soldiers meant to mock Jesus, they pointed out his role as Messiah. Christ laid aside his Crown of Glory to become one of us. The crown of thorns symbolized the sinfulness of humanity which Jesus bore. And what did he do with it? He carried that crown of sin and shame to the Cross where he exchanged himself for humanity. He paid the price for our sin.

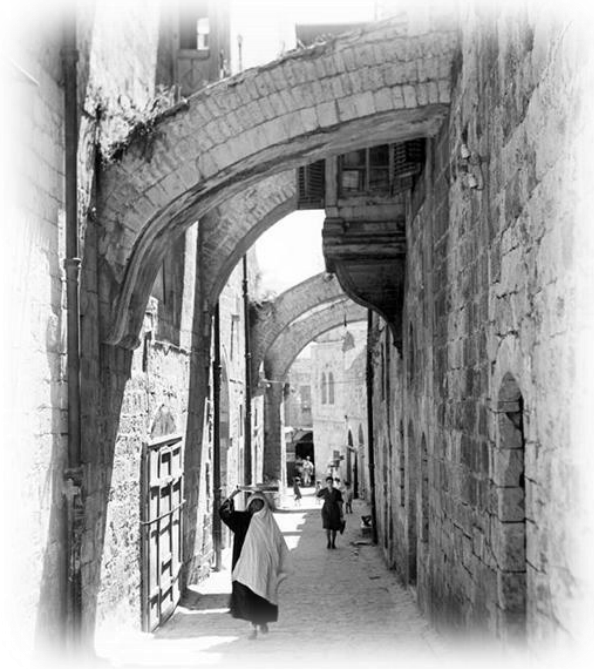
What sins are you bearing? What thorns are growing in your path because of your choices? Be assured that Christ has taken your burdens and carried them to the Cross.

Pray: Jesus, help me to recognize the consequences of my sin. Help me to turn myself over to you. Thank you for paying the price for my salvation. Amen.

Week 3:

God's Promise in the

Path Jesus Walked



*Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. **John 19:14-17***

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter... **Isaiah 53:6-7***

Sin separates us from our Heavenly Father. Like rebellious teens, all of us have turned to our own way. God's voice has spoken, and we have answered, *"It's MY life! I'll walk my own path!"* We are the prodigal children.

Despite our rebellion and hardness of heart, God never stops loving us. Jesus loves us so much that he came down to walk with us. Leaving the courtyard of Pilate, he took up the Cross and set out on the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows. Yet it is not his own pain, suffering, and sorrow that Jesus bore on this path. It is the sorrow and heartache for us, God's lost children.

The word "repent" literally means "to turn back." Christ walked the path to the Cross so that we could follow him back to God. What things in your life do you need to repent from? In what areas of your life do you need to turn around and follow Christ?

Pray: Jesus, I confess that I have been rebellious and sinful. I have turned away from your love. Help me to repent and follow you back to God's loving embrace. Amen.

Week 4:

God's Promise in the

Nails



You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

Colossians 2:13-14 NLT

Jesus was nailed to the Cross. The Romans used nails, or iron spikes, about 5 to 7 inches long to nail criminals to their crosses through the wrists and feet or heels. This punishment was intended to be humiliating and excruciatingly painful. Sometimes it took days to die. Can you imagine it?

The arms that stretched out the universe and hung stars and galaxies in the sky were now stretched out on a cross. The hands that formed Adam from the dirt were now opened to be nailed down. We ask ourselves, "Why? Why didn't he stop them? Why didn't he command his angels to free him?"

The crowd of onlookers saw a horrific scene. The priests and Roman officials looked on in satisfied contempt. His followers wept in disbelief. For everything they saw, there was something more. There was something hidden in plain sight.

They couldn't see it, but Jesus could. The angelic host could. God could see. Hidden in plain sight was a list of human transgressions. A list of our mistakes, our greed, our lust. A list of human sin. The nails held the list of charges against us to the Cross. And Jesus' blood covered all our sins and blotted them out. The nails held our sins up against our Salvation.

Pray: Jesus, I thank you for bearing the suffering of the Crucifixion for my salvation. As the nails once held you to the Cross, hold me close to you. Blot out my sins and make me pure again. Amen.

Week 5:

God's Promise in the

Sign



Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'

John 19:19-22

Why is a sign placed over Jesus' head? Why is it written in three languages? Why did it trouble the priests so much?

Pilate didn't intend for the sign to spread Jesus' message. He likely intended it more as a threat: **"This is what happens to those who challenge Rome."** Yet Pilate was unknowingly acting as God's messenger.

Everyone could read the sign in either Hebrew, Latin, or Greek, the three major languages of the region. They represented religion and tradition, law and government, and culture and learning. But in this sign, Jesus was proclaimed as King over all of them.

There is no language God won't speak to reach us. How is God speaking to you? What language is He using to grab your attention? We're not talking English, Spanish, Chinese, or Arabic. God speaks in the day-to-day joys and sorrows, blessings and absences, in the rhythms of work and rest, days and nights, youth and age. Your Heavenly Father speaks **your** language; look for the signs all around you.

Pray: Jesus, help me to look for signs of your presence all around me. Give me eyes to see you in others. Give me ears to listen to your voice. Speak to me in the rhythm of life and guide me back to you. Amen.

Week 6:

God's Promise in the

Cross



And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 3:14-17

Throughout the history of the church there have been various interpretations of God's nature. Some have focused on a righteous God. Others see a punishing, vengeful God. Don't forget the kind and merciful God. And, of course, many prefer a *quid pro quo* God that grants wishes in exchange for obedience.

It can be very confusing. Some ask, "How can a holy, righteous God let sinners go unpunished? Others say, "How could a loving God allow tragedy?" And some ask, "How can a kind God punish us?"

God has a different perspective. God's response to all these questions is the Cross. The Cross reaches up, pointing to God's righteousness and holiness. The Cross also reaches out like God's arms embracing us. The Cross is the intersection between sinful humanity and God's holy love. And there on the Cross is where Jesus took his throne.

God gave his only Son, so that we might have eternal life. Where the world saw a symbol of shame, Jesus took his throne of Glory. Through the Cross, Jesus built a bridge of Salvation, reuniting us with God.

Pray: Jesus, as I gaze upon your wonderful Cross, keep me rooted in you. Help me to take up my cross and follow you. Amen.

Week 7:

God's Promise in the

Burial Clothes



*After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. **John 19: 38-40***

Whatever remote hope left in John's heart that Jesus *might* still be alive disappeared when Joseph and Nicodemus arrived to take Jesus' body for burial. The graveclothes were the final notice of what John already knew. His teacher, his master, his friend, Jesus, had died. This tragedy was real.

Joseph and Nicodemus came to do a final service for their master. They came to prepare Jesus' body for its final resting place. Nicodemus does something else, although quietly. The quantity of anointing oils, spices, and ointments would be the amount used for a king. In this final act of love and service, Nicodemus silently proclaimed that Jesus really was the King of the Jews.

The power of Jesus' burial clothes lies not in the proclamation of Jesus as king. The real impact wouldn't be realized until Sunday. On Sunday morning the disciples found that Jesus was gone from the tomb, but his graveclothes remained, neatly folded. Tragedy had been transformed into miracle! Jesus can likewise turn all your tragedies into miracle, sins into salvation!

Pray: I give you thanks for your transformative power in my life. Continue to work miracles in me. Help to live in you. Amen.

