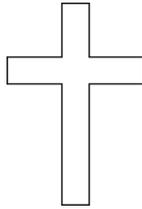
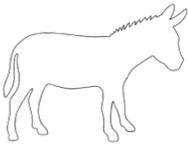


ONE EXTRAORDINARY WEEK



JONATHAN CHANCEY





ONE EXTRAORDINARY WEEK

A Holy Week Devotional

PROLOGUE

Does it strike you as odd that the gospels devote so much space to just one week of Jesus' life?

Out of the 89 chapters of the gospels, 29 of them are zoomed in on this one extraordinary week. Eight of the 28 chapters in Matthew, Six of the 16 chapters in Mark, five of Luke's 24, and ten of the 21 chapters in John focus exclusively on this one week of Jesus' life. It seems that each gospel author, in their own way, wants to bring their readers as quickly as possible to the cross of Jesus Christ. Their aim is not to present a full history of Jesus' life. John says the whole world could not contain such a book (John

21:25). No, their aim is to fix our eyes on what is most significant. They aim to bring us as quickly as possible to the death of Jesus Christ, and to the victory of his resurrection.

Christians throughout the ages have referred to the week leading up to Christ's death and resurrection as "Holy Week." Regardless of your church background, high-church, low-church, or anywhere in between, it's important for each of us to seize moments like this to remember the extraordinary work of Jesus Christ. Times like this are ripe for extraordinary devotion and worship as we reflect on work of our savior.

Jesus' life was extraordinary

The God who created all things entered into his own creation to redeem it from the curse of sin. The eternal, unchanging Son of God was born as a baby boy, and grew into a man. He lived as no one ever has, perfectly obeying the will of God his Father.

Jesus' death was extraordinary

The God of love was hated by man. Although he was innocent, he was arrested, tried, and executed as a

lawbreaker. Those who watched him breathe his last "were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54). His was a death of unsurpassable purpose and significance. He became as we are and died as we deserved, that through faith in Him, we might become as he is and live as he does.

All of this would be of no value at all, however, if not for this incredible truth:

Jesus' resurrection was extraordinary

The resurrection of Jesus is the central message of Christianity. It is the good news that we proclaim! Christ Jesus did not stay in the grave! He is alive! He is Risen! He alone is worthy of our praise! Because he lives, we have the blessed assurance of life forever with him. So in this extraordinary week, we look back to the cross, and we look forward with eager expectation to his return, when we will join him in resurrection life.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We've put together this devotional guide to help you reflect on the events of "Holy Week." It's our prayer that as you spend time in daily worship, your heart would be thankful for all God has accomplished for us in Jesus Christ.

To help your devotions throughout this important week, we've selected readings for each day, following the four gospels on their way to the cross. In addition to the readings from God's word, each day includes a brief meditation. If you're short on time, skip over our words and read what God has written!

I'm always amazed by Jesus' interactions with his followers after his resurrection. Luke records how when he met with his disciples, "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45). I'm certain he

will do the same for us, if we only ask. So, as you open up this guide each day, take a moment to pray. Ask God to help you understand and apply his word.

Lastly, we encourage you to use this guide together! If something from God's word is a help to you, then you can be sure that it will also be a help to someone else. Open God's book together. Share it with one another. Encourage one another through this extraordinary week.

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21

SUNDAY

An Extraordinary King

Scripture Reading: Matthew 21:1-11

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Matthew 21:9

What has been the most anticipated moment of your life? Was it driving off the lot with your first car? Finally receiving your hard-earned degree? Meeting your spouse? Holding a newborn grandchild? It seems that our most anticipated moments never happen exactly how we expect them to.

For the people of Israel, their most anticipated moment was the coming of their extraordinary King. The prophet Zechariah anticipated this extraordinary entrance over 500 years before it happened!

He writes,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9)

God promised to send a king, but not just any king. This king would reign forever. Where the former kings had failed, this king would lead his people in righteous perfection. He would never lie, never cheat, never fail in his duties to lead and protect his people. This king would bring salvation.

Today, Palm Sunday, we remember the triumphal entry of the Promised Ruler into the "city of the Great King" (Ps. 48:2). The king had arrived... but not as we might have expected.

This indeed was no ordinary entrance. Jesus requests that a donkey and a colt be brought to him. If anyone finds this strange, he instructs the disciples to tell them, "The Lord needs them" (Mt. 21:3). Jesus enters into

Jerusalem, the city of God, not as an ordinary citizen, but as Lord, Messiah, King.

Men and women lined the streets to welcome this extraordinary King. They lay their cloaks down in submission; they spread palms as a symbol of victory; they shouted in praise and admiration: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Save us, our promised, anticipated, extraordinary King! And he would... though not as they expected. This king has come to die.

As I read this passage, part of me wishes I could have been there to see it. I wish I could have been in that crowd, welcoming the King to His city. I wish I could have been among those who bowed down in worship at his coming, and tasted the joy of long-anticipated fulfillment.

Yet, for those in Christ, there is still greater joy to come! The anticipation is not yet over! The King has made a promise: "...I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn. 14:3). He tells us again in Revelation 22:20, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Jesus came to his people the first time to die for their sins. When he comes again, it will be to reign forever as our extraordinary King.

This Palm Sunday, let us welcome him again to reign in our hearts and lives. Let us sit on the edge of our seats as we expect him to make good on his promise to come again. Let us both remember and anticipate the coming of our extraordinary King.

MONDAY

An Extraordinary Cleansing

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:12-19

"...My house shall be called a house of prayer for all
peoples!"

Isaiah 56:7

When I was a college student, there were four words that would snap my roommates and me into action: “The landlord is coming.” We would jump quickly into a whirlwind of “cleaning,” stuffing loose articles of clothing and last week’s dishes into closets and out of sight.

I now understand this to be a universal phenomenon: we tend to accomplish more house cleaning in the half hour before company arrives than we do in an entire week

otherwise. This is especially true if your visitor is the owner of the house.

It's one thing to maintain your own home for a visitor, but it's quite another to care for someone else's property. The stakes are much higher! The expectation is greater! When the owner arrives, he should find the home in good order, fully functioning as he desires.

When Jesus and his disciples enter Jerusalem on Monday morning, they immediately make their way to the temple. The owner has arrived. God himself enters the temple... and he does not like what he sees. The temple was meant to be a place of worship. It was to be a place where men would meet with God, a place of praise and a "house of prayer for all nations."

In place of prayer, Jesus saw perversion. This "house of prayer" had become a "den of robbers." Tables were set up where visitors could buy and sell items for sacrifice, exchange their currency, and pay their tax. The temple was as much a marketplace as it was a place of worship.

Jesus sees the mess and immediately starts cleaning house. He "began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of

the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons” (Mk. 11:15).

How do you think the tenants should respond to the owner’s displeasure? With sorrow? Remorse? With feelings of guilt or shame? All of these might have been appropriate, but that is not what happened. Rather, “the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.”

The irony is unmistakable: those who were responsible to keep this house pure would rather kill the owner, the Great Purifier himself, than listen and be purified by him. So they sought to destroy him, rather than receive him.

The earthly temple in Jerusalem, significant though it was, was not the ultimate dwelling place of God with man. Ever since sin disrupted man’s fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden, God has been pursuing a way to dwell with man. Ultimately, the temple pointed toward something greater: Jesus himself. Jesus was the true temple of God, the fullness of God in the presence of men. If we are to worship God as he intends, we must do so in Jesus Christ. Something greater than the temple is here! (Mt. 12:6).

In a shocking statement, 1 Corinthians 6:19 adds to this thought. Paul writes, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"

In Christ, the true temple, you are the temple of God. In Christ, God made a way not just to dwell amongst his people, but to dwell within them.

Our responsibility? We must care for his temple. We must maintain it as a pure place of worship. We must honor the owner's intent, that it be a place of worship and a house of prayer.

The Lesson from the Fig Tree

Mark bookends this cleansing of the temple with an interesting story of Jesus and a fig tree. At first glance, the two stories might seem unrelated. This unfruitful tree, however, has much in common with the unfruitful temple.

On the way into town from Bethany, Jesus sees a fig tree from a distance. From far away, he can see that the tree is in leaf, suggesting it was ready to bear fruit. As he got closer, however, he found nothing but leaves. The tree had the appearance of fruitfulness, yet bore no fruit. Jesus pronounces a curse on the tree, or more precisely, on all

who are like this tree. He pronounces a curse on all who might have the appearance of religiosity but lack its substance. He pronounces a curse on all who might act like those in the temple, appearing to be in service of the Lord, but ultimately serving themselves.

The steady current of sin causes us to drift from the what we were made to be. However we may appear on the outside, our true purpose is to worship the Lord with "all our heart, soul, strength, and mind" (Lk. 10:27). Truly, it is only in Him that we can bear fruit at all. Jesus reminds us, "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15:4)

From the temple, we learn God must abide within us, and from the fig tree we learn we can only bear fruit if we abide in God. God in us, and us in God. Exactly as it is meant to be.

His cleansing work is not done in you. Pray the Lord would remove every obstacle, every hindrance from our worship of Him. Pray he would help us to not just appear to be fruitful, but to abide in Him, and bear much fruit. Pray we would be what he has made us to be.

TUESDAY

An Extraordinary Teacher

Scripture Reading: Luke 20:1-21:37

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will
not pass away"

Luke 21:33

As a fairly young pastor, I often wonder whether people who hear me teach are asking themselves, "Who does this guy think he is?" "Who gives him the authority to say these things?" To tell the truth, if I dared to speak on my own authority, they'd be right.

My words are not much help at all, but God's words are. When I teach, I often preface my prayer with something like this: "My words will not be any use to you at all unless they are God's words. So let's come to him

and ask him to speak to us today.” I then open up the Bible, and with God’s help, I explain what it means.

When Jesus began to teach on the Tuesday before his crucifixion, he was challenged by the best and the brightest teachers of his day, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority” (Lk. 20:2).

Unlike you or me, Jesus does not appeal to life experience, education, or natural talent to prove his qualifications. He teaches with extraordinary skill and precision because he is the ultimate authority. He is the great and extraordinary teacher.

As we read this text, we shouldn’t let the irony slip us by. Who was it that made the mind of man? Who made his mouth (Ex. 4:11)? Who taught him to breath, to think, to inquire? Yet here is man, in all his pride, asking the Lord, “Who gave you the authority to teach as you do?”

Whether we realize it or not, you and I are often guilty of this same type of pride. We question God’s authority when we disobey what he has plainly told us to do. We question the worth of his instruction when we neglect to spend time in his word. We make it quite clear who we want the authority to be.

Throughout the rest of Luke 20-21, we see Jesus teaching and instructing. He spends his last hours answering questions, settling disputes, diverting accusations, instructing, and teaching.

It's not unusual for people to think of Jesus as a good teacher. Most of his "students" in this passage hated him, yet they called him "teacher." However, this scripture will not allow us to leave it at that. Jesus is not merely one teacher amongst many. He is more than good - he is extraordinary. His words do not merely instruct, they transform. They do not merely predict the future, they ordain it. While everything else in heaven and Earth may pass away, the words of the Lord remain forever.

What kind of teacher says this? One who has eternal authority. Therefore, we do not read the words of God as we do any other book. When the Teacher says it, we believe it. We do not check it against science, culture, family, tradition, or emotion to deem it true or false. We receive it for what it is: the ultimate and final authority from our extraordinary teacher.

From time to time, you and I may "hit a wall" in our walk with God. Your prayers shrivel up, your devotions are sparse, and you feel like you're not learning or

growing at all. Whatever the reason for this, I have some good news: God has not given up on teaching you about himself. He loves to do so, and there is much to learn.

To be sure, both now and into eternity we will never run out of new truths to learn, new glorious depths to explore, new praises to sing about our God. In short, he will never stop teaching, and we will never stop learning.

So if you've run into a dry week, a dry month, or a dry year, be encouraged. You still have much to learn, and the great Teacher is ready to teach you.

If this is true, and it certainly is, let us come to him. Let us hunger and thirst for the word of the Lord. We must open the book he has written and ask him to teach us yet again. He is faithful, he is extraordinary, and he will do it.

WEDNESDAY

An Extraordinary Plan

Scripture Reading: Luke 21:38-22:1-6

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men"

Acts 2:23

One of the most memorable lines in television history is Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith's catch phrase from "The A-Team," "I love it when a plan comes together!" On Wednesday of Holy Week, we see the unfolding of an extraordinary plan: God's eternal plan of redemption.

In our passage today, the attention shifts away from Jesus and onto those who sought to destroy Him. As Jesus went about teaching in the temple, "the chief priests and

the scribes were seeking how to put him to death” (Lk. 22:2).

As Jesus taught in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes boiled with anger. They could no longer withstand the way he spoke with such authority, claiming to be God. If he would not be silenced, then he must be killed. It was time for Jesus to die. An innocent man is not easily killed, however. Those who sought to kill him needed a plan.

As we see, they were not working alone. Someone else was planning right alongside them to destroy this extraordinary man. As they schemed, “Satan entered into Judas,” and led him to the chief priests and officers (Lk. 22:3). There they discussed how he would betray his Lord, “and they were glad” (Lk. 22:5).

They had been seeking a way to destroy Christ for some time now, but Satan had been trying for much longer. From the earliest moments in the Garden of Eden, when God promised to send a Savior to crush the head of the serpent, Satan sought a way to avoid his certain doom.

As much as they hated the Son of God, Satan hated him even more. As angry as they were when the crowds gathered to hear Him, Satan was much angrier. As glad

as they were to finally have a plan in place to kill him, the pleasure was all Satan's... or so he thought.

What they didn't realize was that while they were carefully acting out their plan, God was acting out his. The death and betrayal of the Son of God would be no tragic accident; it was the outworking of the eternal plan of God. What they didn't understand was that Jesus came to die. He chose to endure ridicule, shame, and betrayal. He chose to give up his life. It was all part of the plan.

Peter's words in Acts 2:23 make it clear, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

This Jesus was delivered up according to the plan of the chief priests, according to the plan of Judas, according to the plan of Satan, but ultimately, according to the plan of God.

What do you think? Does this make God mean? Does it make Him some sort of "cosmic child abuser" as some have suggested? Certainly not! Don't you think Jesus was in on the plan? The extraordinary plan of the gospel shows him to be glorious, wise, and gracious. It shows

Jesus to be humble (Phil. 2:8). It shows him to be love (1 John 4:9).

What an extraordinary God we worship! We worship a God who would give himself for his people. The extraordinary plan of redemption, God's plan, was at long last being fulfilled. What others meant for evil, God meant for good (Gen. 50:20).

As I consider this truth, I'm reminded of the moving words of the hymn, "How Great Thou Art,"

"And when I think, that God his son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in. That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died, to take away my sin."

God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. Don't you love it when a good plan comes together?

THURSDAY

An Extraordinary Fellowship

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:12-41, John 17

"The glory you have given me I have given to them,
that they may be one even as we are one"

John 17:22

It's Thursday of Holy Week, and the mission of Jesus is nearing its end. It might be helpful at this point to remember exactly what that mission was! To sum it up in a word, Jesus was on a mission to restore fellowship. He came to restore man's fellowship with God. He came to make us one.

Fellowship is one of those words that are often watered down in churches. We attach the word in front of a meal, or a Hall, or a handshake, and eventually forget what it

means altogether. Surely fellowship is more than conversation and finger foods! True fellowship is communion, oneness, belonging. Jesus was on a mission to restore true fellowship.

On Thursday of Holy Week, the disciples enjoyed fellowship with Jesus and with one another. At the Passover meal, Jesus does something incredible. He lifts the bread and says, "Take; this is my body." He lifts the cup and says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." He is inviting his friends to partake in something much more than ordinary bread and wine. He invites us to partake of Himself.

Why did Jesus die? He died to restore what sin had broken. He died to restore fellowship with God and one another. He died "that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

This Passover meal, incredible as it was, was tainted with the presence of sin. Betrayal loomed heavily. Sorrow and uncertainty filled the air. Yet, despite the somber mood, Jesus offers a subtle word of hope: "Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mk. 14:25).

“Until that day when I drink it new.” There is coming a day, he says, when we will again share a meal. There is coming a day when we will eat and drink, converse and laugh, without a trace of sin in sight. There is coming a day when true fellowship will finally be restored.

This is what Jesus prayed for us in the final hours before his betrayal. He prayed “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn. 17:21). Our fellowship, you see, should be distinct to the watching world. It points above and beyond ourselves, to the God who is three in one.

What an amazing truth for us to meditate on today! In Jesus Christ, sinners are made one with God. We are united to a family of brothers and sisters, all sharing in the extraordinary fellowship Christ purchased with his own blood.

So, as we reflect on these truths, we remember the fellowship Christ purchased for us at the cross, we pursue true fellowship with our brothers and sisters, and we look ahead to the day when we will all taste true fellowship again.

FRIDAY

An Extraordinary Substitute

Scripture Reading: Luke 22:47-23:56

"...They kept shouting, 'Crucify, crucify him!'"

Luke 23:21

On June 23, 1917, Babe Ruth and Ernie Shore combined for one of the strangest no-hitters in baseball history. For the uninitiated, a no-hitter is about the best a pitcher can do with a baseball. A no-hitter is rare, but a combined no-hitter is nearly unheard of.

You might think that in a two-man, combined no-hitter, both pitchers would contribute to the cause. However, this is what makes this particular no-hitter so strange. Babe Ruth, pitching for the Boston Red Sox at the time, took the mound and promptly walked the

leadoff batter, Washington Senators second baseman Ray Morgan. He apparently didn't agree with the umpire's calls, so he proceeded to argue until he got so mad he charged off the mound and threw a series of punches to the umpire's head. Needless to say, Ruth was ejected, and a substitute was put on the mound.

Ernie Shore entered in Ruth's place and proceeded to retire the next 26 batters, after catching Morgan trying to steal second base. He pitched a perfect game.

The one who should have been on the mound, Babe Ruth, contributed nothing. He walked a man, embarrassed himself, and punched an umpire. He disqualified himself and took a seat on the bench. His substitute, Ernie Shore, did it all. When you take a look at the list of all 296 no-hitters since 1876, be sure to look for June 23, 1917. There you will find the names Babe Ruth and Ernie Shore listed together, both of them credited for the work of a perfect substitute.

As we come to Friday of Holy Week, the day of Jesus' death, it's important that we understand Jesus died as a perfect substitute - an extraordinary substitute. In fact, we cannot fully grasp the significance of what happened on

the cross until we come to terms with the fact that Jesus did not simply die; he died in our place. He died as a substitute, "...the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter. 3:18).

The story of Jesus and Barabbas so powerfully illustrates this for us. Jesus was clearly innocent. On this, Pilate and Herod agreed. Pilate told the crowds, "...behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us..." (Lk. 23:14-15). Yet the crowds cried out, "...!Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas!— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder (Lk. 23:18-19). Pilate pleaded with them three times, desiring to release the innocent Christ, but they had made their decision.

Pilate "released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will" (Lk. 23:25).

A guilty man was given a righteous man's reward. A righteous man died a guilty man's death. If this seems unfair to you, you're absolutely right. This is what it means for Jesus to be our extraordinary substitute.

When we look to the cross, we should be reminded that Jesus died in our place. The holy wrath of God against sin, our sin, was poured out on one who was completely righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21, one of the most glorious verses in the Bible, says this: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

On the cross, as Jesus died, the perfect Lamb of God became sin. He was punished for our sin. He died for our sin. He died in our place. By faith in his perfect sacrifice, we, the guilty, become the very righteousness of God.

In other words, you and I are Babe Ruth. We are Barabbas. We are guilty and disqualified. We have contributed nothing. Even so, when all is said and done, because of the work of our extraordinary substitute, God sees our name next to Jesus'. His accomplishment is credited to us. His righteousness is credited to us. His perfection is credited to us. On Good Friday, we look to the cross and praise God that we have an extraordinary substitute, who took our place and died our death.

SATURDAY

An Extraordinary Silence

Scripture Reading: Matthew 27:62-66, Psalm 46

"We will not fear, though the earth gives way"

Psalm 46:2

It is Saturday, and Jesus' body lies in the grave. The author of life is dead. God's own son, the extraordinary prophet, priest, and king, the long awaited hope of God's people, lies motionless in a tomb. It is extraordinarily silent.

As I reflect on the events of this day, I wonder how Jesus' followers must have felt. Their Lord was dead. The one who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," was gone (Jn. 14:6). It's easy for us, 2,000 years removed from these events, to miss the drama of this reality. Sure, Jesus

plainly told his followers this would take place, but that doesn't make it any less difficult to process (Mt. 20:17-19). His death immediately thrust his believers into a state of great tension: they must trust the words of a dead man.

Saturday was an incredible test of faith for the follower of Christ. Will they continue to trust in Christ, even in his absence?

I'm reminded of the words of Psalm 46:1-3:

“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear
though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved
into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

I love the confidence of this Psalm! There is a rock-solid place of refuge for every believer in even the most difficult of circumstances. Picture the chaos of this imagery: the earth gives way; mountains crumble into the sea, the waters roar and the mountains shake. Yet, the

heart of the believer is still. He is not afraid. His confidence is not shaken. His God is near.

It is the challenge for every believer of every age to trust in God amidst the chaos of a fallen world. It was the great test of Christ's followers to believe that God was a very present help, though for a moment, Christ lay dead in the grave.

Amidst every trial, every test, every temptation, every tear, is God's invitation to us:

“Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10).

I've seen plenty of fireworks shows, but I remember one in particular. Explosions of color and light flashed in synchronized perfection. I kept waiting for the show to end, but it simply kept going, each firework bigger and brighter than the last. Soon, the bursts were so close together I could hardly tell them apart. For a moment, loud explosions filled the quiet night, crackling color painted the black canvas. Then, it was quiet. The smoke

settled. The sky returned to black. It was still. The crowds, however, had not moved. They remained steadfast, heads tilted upward, staring into the blank night sky. We waited like this for several minutes, all of us seemingly looking at absolutely nothing.

Why did we do this? We sat in the silence because we knew the show was not yet over. The best was yet to come. So, we waited. We expected. We looked upward. We were still. This week has been filled with its share of fireworks. Yet, as the smoke clears, as Jesus lies dead in the grave, we know the show is not yet over. There is still more to come. The dramatic conclusion is near.

I pray the church would have this sense of eager expectation for the presence of God. We believe Christ will come again. God will again dwell with his people. To the rest of the world, we may appear to be looking at absolutely nothing, but we know better. So we wait. We expect. We look upward. Even though the earth gives way, we are still. We know the show is not yet over. The best is yet to come.

SUNDAY

An Extraordinary Victory

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:1-15, Luke 24:13-53

"He is not here, for he has risen, as he said"

Matthew 28:6

We've reached Sunday, and what an extraordinary day it is! Today is what the gospel is all about. Today is what we celebrate as Christians. Today is where our hope is found!

As Christians, we are people of the cross. We love to talk about the cross! We sing about the cross, we preach about the cross, we wear the cross on our necks and on our wrists. We say alongside the apostle Paul, "We preach Christ crucified (...) Christ the power of God and the

wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24). We boast in nothing but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14).

Yet, without the resurrection, the cross is nothing to boast about at all. In fact, the cross without the resurrection is very bad news! Without the resurrection, the plan of God ends with one giant loss.

Sometimes, children make the best theologians. I occasionally ask my two-year-old son, “What’s the gospel?” He says, “Good news!” Then I reply, “What’s the good news?” He says, “Jesus is alive!”

The resurrection of Jesus is the very center of the good news of the gospel. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ lives! He has won!

When the two Marys visited Jesus’ tomb, they were the first to hear this good news. The angel told them, “He is not here, for he has risen, as he said” (Matt. 28:6). What a feeling it must have been to hear these words! Every word Jesus spoke was true! The grave is empty, and he is alive!

The resurrection is an extraordinary victory. It is the demise of everything wrong with this fallen world, and the beginning of something extraordinary. Jesus’ resurrection is a resounding victory over our three greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil.

When he rose, the power of sin was broken

The curse that has plagued all mankind since the Garden of Eden is tossed aside with his blood-stained grave clothes. We need not succumb to the lure of temptation. In him, we can know victory over the curse of sin.

When he rose, the sting of death was made null

We face the wages of our sin with a taunt, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55). The sting of death was driven into the palms of our savior. In him, what can death do but bring us to God?

When he rose, our greatest enemy was handed a death sentence

When Jesus rose to life, Satan was dealt a mortal blow. The prowling lion was tied to a leash. He roars and he rages, but he knows his execution is near; "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20).

God's redeeming work, his great rescue mission, does not end with a loss. He is victorious! The resurrection of

Jesus is the beginning of the victory celebration that will never end for God and his people.

Today, we celebrate our extraordinary savior. As we gather together for worship, we taste the fruits of his victory: a people united in worship of the one true God, ransomed and redeemed with the blood of Christ. When we worship together, his church, his bride, we proclaim the extraordinary victory we have in Jesus Christ. This is what Easter is all about.

So, we close our week with the lines of a classic hymn. To God be the glory now and forever. Praise the Lord!

"To God be the glory, great things He hath done,
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life our redemption to win,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,

And give Him the glory; great things He hath done!"

