

Daily Bible Readings on

Matthew 26 - 28

The Passion of the King

Week 1: Prepared For Death	Matthew 26:1-16
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You Need Easter

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Prepared by Linda & Trevor Oakley



Introduction

Welcome to this seven-week Daily Bible Reading guide which looks at the Gospel of Matthew's account of the final days of Jesus life on earth – from the Last Supper (in Chapter 26) to the Great Commission (in Chapter 28). Devastatingly, this records the betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Gloriously, we also read of the resurrection and reappearance of Jesus. From death to life – how Jesus turns the norm upside down.

In these devotions we walk with Jesus as the world is turned upside down for all those who see and hear the events that occur in these passion passages. For each week there are several daily readings (no more than five each week) – each day offering a quick slice of the narrative. The hope is that these short devotions will help you to engage with what God discloses to us in his word – reading the text, exploring the passage (with some short comprehension questions), pondering the short explanation, and then praying in response.

These devotions do not do all the work for you – they leave you to reflect on what you have read and understood and gives you the opportunity to work out how to apply that into your life each day.

I am thankful for Linda and Trevor Oakley for writing these devotionals. They serve us well.

May this Easter stroll bring you face to face with the Lord and Saviour Jesus.



Ken D Noakes

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Week 1: Prepared for Death - Matthew 26:1-16

1. When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 2 “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 5 “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.” 6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. 9 “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” 10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly 13 I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” 14 Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests 15 and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Day 1: Read Matthew 26: 1-2

**Read the previous passages where Jesus predicts his death and resurrection:
Matthew 16: 21-23, 17: 22-23, 20: 18-19**

Exploring the Passage

1. How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus said, *‘the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified’*?
2. How does Jesus react to Peter’s protest in 16: 21-23?
3. Why do you think the disciples make no comment on Jesus predicting that he will be raised to life (16: 21-23, 17: 22-23, 20: 18-19)?

Explaining the Passage

How could it be true that the Messiah, God’s champion, would be crucified? We can imagine their horror at the word, ‘crucified’. Crucifixion was the most cruel and agonising of death penalties, used by the Romans to crush opposition. Jesus knows that in order to pay the penalty for the sins of the whole world, he must suffer and die. As soon as Jesus begins his public ministry, Satan attacks Jesus, tempting him to disobey God’s plan (Matthew 4:1-11). Peter’s words of loyalty and love will become a stumbling block if they deflect Jesus from God’s purposes. To be a perfect sacrifice for sin, Jesus must go to the cross.

Prayer

O Lord, help me to understand the true meaning of the cross. There is no other way. If you hadn’t taken the punishment for my sins with your own blood, I couldn’t be forgiven. Help me to place my trust in you alone, my Lord and my Saviour. Amen.

Day 2: Read Exodus 12: 1-12 & v29

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbour, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover. “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well.

Exploring the Passage

1. What instructions are given about preparing and eating the lamb at the Passover Meal?
2. Why is the blood to be spread on the sides and top of the door frames of their houses?
3. How can Jesus’ death on the cross be compared to God’s rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt?

Explaining the Passage

All of the Old Testament points to Jesus and God's plan to rescue us from sin. In the days of Moses, God heard the cries of his people who were slaves in Egypt. When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, God brought ten plagues upon the Egyptians. The final plague was the death of every first born son. Only those who spread the blood of the lamb on their door frames were saved from God's judgement.

Through the events of the Passover, we are reminded that God is the author of our salvation. Because Jesus, innocent of any sin, dies in our place, God passes over our guilt. The blood of Jesus protects us from God's condemnation of our sin. Look for more connections as you continue reading through Matthew.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are a Holy God, offended by my sin. Please forgive me when I take your love and mercy for granted. Help me to see how your own Son, Jesus became the Passover lamb, the one true sacrifice for sin. Help me to be truly sorry for my sins. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for all that you have done for me. Amen.

Day 3: Read Matthew 26: 3-5

Exploring the Passage

1. What is the purpose of the secret meeting of the chief priests and elders?

2. Why did they plan to wait until after the Festival?

Explaining the Passage

Meanwhile, the chief priests and elders of the people hold an urgent meeting in the palace of Caiaphas. These are the members of the Council called the Sanhedrin. In AD 15, an awkward situation had been forced upon the Jews. Although the former High Priest, Annas was still alive, the Romans had approved the appointment of his son-in-law, Caiaphas. So the Jews had two reigning High Priests. They each believe they are in control. They determine to arrest Jesus *in some sly way and kill him*. Preoccupied with their own evil plans, these religious and civil leaders have no idea that the Almighty God is about to bring judgement upon his only Son, so *that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life* (John 3:15).

Prayer

Almighty God, you rule over all kingdoms and governments. Help me to honour you and not become full of my own importance. Thank you for sending your Son into our world to provide the way of salvation. Whatever happens, help me to remember that you are in control of everything in my life. Amen

Day 4: Read Matthew 26: 6-13

Exploring the Passage

1. What do the disciples think of the woman's actions?
2. What reasons does Jesus give for his approval?
3. What is holding you back from worshipping Jesus with your whole heart?

Explaining the Passage

A woman pours expensive perfume on the head of Jesus. According to the gospel writers, this kind of lavish display of reverence for Jesus happens more than once. Each time, the disciples seem a bit shocked by the waste of money. They leave it to Jesus to praise her actions. Perhaps, the disciples will regret their criticism when they witness the suffering of their Lord on the cross. Later, the disciples will be glad to tell her story. It reminds us that we need to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and strength.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, like the woman with the expensive perfume, help me to worship you with my whole heart. Help me to give up selfish ways and serve you faithfully each day. Help me to obey your commands and to give generously of my time, talents and resources for the sake of the gospel. Amen.

Day 5: Read Matthew 26: 14-16

Exploring the Passage

1. Who did Judas go to and how much money was he offered?

2. How does Judas reveal his self-interest in this act of betrayal?

Explaining the Passage

V14. *One of the twelve....* How painful for Matthew to write that it wasn't an enemy but one of their inner circle who betrayed the Lord Jesus. Many people have tried to find reasons for Judas' monstrous betrayal. Well, we don't have a backstory for Judas. Sadly, after the betrayal, there's nothing positive to be said. No repentance, no restoration. Unlike Peter, who also betrayed his Lord, there is no sequel for Judas. More about that in Chapters 26 & 27. Judas is paid thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave, to betray the Lord (Exodus 21: 32).

Prayer

O Lord, I cannot boast in my own goodness. I am sorry for a thousand ways in which my life betrays the love you have for me. Please forgive me. When I struggle in weakness and fear, please give me strength to do what is right. Help me to admit my faults, and come to you for help to change my behaviour. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Week 2: A Revealing Meal - Matthew 26: 17-35

17On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 18 He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.' " 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. 20When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" 23Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." 25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "You have said so." 26While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." 27Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." 30When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: " 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' 32But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." 33Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." 34 "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." 35But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Day 1: Read Matthew 26: 17-19

Exploring the Passage

1. Why do you think Jesus says, '*My appointed time is near*'?

2. What instructions does Jesus give about preparing the Passover?

Explaining the Passage

The festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread served as annual reminders of how God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. In these feasts, there is a reminder of the hasty preparations made by the escaping slaves. Also, as the people removed all the yeast from their houses, they were reminded of God's holiness.

Jesus chose to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. The words, '*My appointed time is near*', which Matthew includes, shows this is God's timing. Despite the plans of the Sanhedrin, the death of Jesus will take place in the middle of Passover. Jesus is aware that he is the Passover Lamb, the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you alone are holy. There is no one like you. In my best moments, I know I fall far short of your standards. Please forgive me. With the help of your Holy Spirit, I want to grow more like the Lord Jesus. May all that I do and say bring honour and glory to your holy name. Amen.

Day 2: Read Matthew 26: 20-25

Exploring the Passage

1. How do the disciples respond to Jesus' announcement about his betrayal?

2. What does Jesus say about the betrayer? How does Judas respond?

Explaining the Passage

As they all recline at the table, they take a piece of bread and dip it into the sauce served in a common bowl as is the custom. The disciples seem to have no idea of the treachery of Judas. Instead, they are all worried that they might be the one. Even after Jesus' dire warning, Judas continues to pretend his innocence. John records that, without letting the other disciples know, Jesus sends Judas on his way, '*What you are about to do, do quickly*' (John 13: 27-28). So, according to God's plan, Jesus *will* be put to death during the Passover Feast.

Prayer

From Psalm 113 (Hallel Psalm - sung at Passover)

Praise the Lord. Praise O Servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised both now and evermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised. Amen

Day 3: Read Matthew 26: 26-30

Exploring the Passage

1. What special meaning does Jesus give to the bread and the cup?

2. When can the disciples expect to share another meal with Jesus?

Explaining the Passage

This is the last supper that Jesus will have with his disciples. He leaves them with a new interpretation of the Passover Feast. He offers thanksgiving as he breaks the bread for them and tells them to eat it because it represents his body. Then he takes the cup and says, *‘Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’*.

With these words, Jesus clearly teaches the disciples that his approaching death is a sacrificial offering like the Passover lamb. They will not understand it fully until they have witnessed Jesus’ death and resurrection. This shared meal we call Holy Communion will become an important part of Christian worship.

At the end of the meal, Jesus and the disciples sing a traditional psalm. Then they head out to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus will take time out to pray and will be exposed to his enemies.

Prayer

From Psalm 115 (Hallel Psalm - sung at Passover)

Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory because of your faithfulness. Why do the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ Our God is in heaven, he does whatever pleases him...

The Lord remembers us and will bless us.

Amen

Day 4: Read Matthew 26: 27 and 1 Corinthians 11: 20-28

27Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.

20So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, 21for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. 22Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! 23For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 27So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

Exploring the Passage

1. What are the Corinthians doing wrong (1 Cor 11: 20-21)?
2. What is the purpose of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11: 26)?
3. How should believers prepare themselves before taking the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11: 27-28)?

Explaining the Passage

Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth shows that the first Christian gatherings had adopted the practice of sharing a meal together. Sadly, Paul needed to remind them of

their table manners. He offers a simple pattern for them to follow. They are to be more considerate of others. Rather than worrying about the food, they should think about the words Jesus spoke to his disciples on that memorable night. The *Lord's Supper*, as Paul calls it, is a simple way to remember what Jesus has done for us.

The Corinthians are not the only church to have got the Lord's Supper wrong. Throughout history, the church has made the mistake of adding its human rituals to the simple eating of bread and drinking of wine. At worst, it made the Lord's Supper a way to earn salvation. It took the Reformation to declare that we are saved by grace alone and that Christ died once and for all.

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11: 26)

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for paying the penalty for my sins. I thank you that as believers, we can share in the bread and the wine of the Holy Communion, reminding us of your death on the cross and your victory over sin and death. Thank you that this shared meal also reassures us that we have eternal life and that one day, the Lord Jesus will return. Come Lord Jesus!
Amen

Day 5: Read Matthew 26: 31-35

Exploring the Passage

1. What does Jesus expect his disciples to do next?

2. How does Peter react?

3. With Peter as spokesperson, what promise do all the disciples make?

Explaining the Passage

Before this night ends, Jesus predicts that all his disciples will desert him. At the table, the disciples are shocked about a betrayal and wonder if one of them might somehow fail. Perhaps, the meal has strengthened their resolve to stand by their Lord. Now, with Peter as their spokesperson, they all declare they are willing to die with Jesus. At the time of Jesus' arrest, it is recorded that the disciples carry swords and are clearly willing to use them, especially Peter. However, Jesus knows that Peter will disown him three times before the rooster crows. In speaking of the sheep scattering when the shepherd is struck, Jesus quotes from Zechariah 13: 7. Jesus will be deserted by all of them.

Prayer

Lord God, you are my refuge and my rock. Help me not to hide from you. Give me the courage to stand firm in my faith. When I am weak, strengthen me so that I can tell others the good news about Jesus. Please forgive me when I fail to speak and act boldly for the sake of the gospel. Amen

Week 3: Deserted & Delivered - Matthew 26:36-56

36Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." 40Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." 43When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 46Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" 47While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." 49Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. 50Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" 55In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Day 1: Read Matthew 26: 36-39

Exploring the Passage

1. Who does Jesus take with him?
2. How would you describe Jesus' state of mind?
3. Why does Jesus need to pray?

Explaining the Passage

Now, Jesus shares with them his own anxieties. He is *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*. The Son of God has not known such a crisis since his conflict with Satan in the wilderness at the beginning of his public ministry. How far must he go to fulfil the will of the Heavenly Father? He has gone through his humble birth, poverty, itinerant ministry, opposition, ridicule and now his enemies are plotting his death. As we watch Jesus in this time of prayer, we are reminded of what it cost him to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

When Jesus is *overwhelmed with sorrow* he prays to his Heavenly Father. We also need to take our anxiety to our Heavenly Father (1 Peter 5: 7).

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Help me to remember how you prayed and trusted the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. Help me to understand how much I need to pray.
Help me not to give in to temptation today. Help me to face pain and suffering with courage, following in the footsteps of Jesus, who was *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*. Whatever happens, help me to keep trusting in you. Amen.

Day 2: Read Matthew 26: 36-39

Exploring the Passage

1. Why do you think he wants three disciples there?
2. How does Jesus' prayer show his obedience?
3. What is the cup that Jesus must drink (26:2)?

Explaining the Passage

The cup of God's wrath is described many times in the Old Testament. Jeremiah declares how God's judgement will come upon both Judah and Jerusalem. When they are cut off from God's protection, God's own people will become the object of horror, scorn and cursing. According to Jeremiah 25: 15-16, when the cup of God's wrath is poured out, strong men will stagger like drunkards, go mad and die and powerful nations will be destroyed. No one will escape God's punishment.

Jesus, an innocent man, will be condemned to death by crucifixion, the worst of human punishments. At the same time, Jesus will be cast out by his Father for sins he has not committed. Yet, Jesus and the Father are One. He who never sinned will take on the sins of the whole world. He will stand in our place. He will drink the cup of God's wrath alone. So, he falls to the ground in prayer before the Father and asks if there is any other way.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you loved the world so much that you sent Jesus to die for me, knowing that I could never save myself. Only Jesus who knew no sin could stand in my place. Thank you, dear Lord Jesus, for drinking from the fearful cup of judgement so that I wouldn't have to. Praise to you, Lord Jesus! Amen

Day 3: Read Matthew 26: 36-46

Exploring the Passage

1. What instructions does Jesus give all the disciples on arrival?
2. Why do you think the chosen three disciples failed?
3. What can we learn from Jesus' words, v 41: '*Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak*'?

Explaining the Passage

Again, the disciples are not looking good. Weary and worried, they can't stay awake to watch. While Jesus is agonising in prayer, they fall asleep. Jesus knows how difficult it's going to be for them. Even in his own distress he cares for them and urges them to pray. Have you experienced times when you found it hard to pray? Here are some ideas that may help:

- Take time to read a Psalm or listen to a favourite Christian song
- Discuss ways of focusing on prayer with a trusted Christian friend.

In the next reading, we see how Jesus, strengthened by prayer, faces what he knows is the Father's will.

Prayer

Lord God, I confess that I have often fallen asleep when I should have been at prayer. Many times, I have let my own affairs take over from the important work of the gospel. So often, I have worried about my own comfort and satisfaction rather than the needs of others. Refresh my spirit to stay alert and pray. Strengthen my faith and help me to be a more effective witness to the Lord Jesus. Amen

Day 4: Read Matthew 26: 47-50

Exploring the Passage

1. Who has sent the large crowd to arrest Jesus?
2. How does Jesus show he is in control?
3. What insights into the character of Judas do the following names provide: *one of the twelve, the betrayer, Friend..?*

Explaining the Passage

Betrayed by a kiss! Perhaps, without camera or internet, the armed crowd is not sure what Jesus looks like but the sign isn't really necessary. Jesus, brave and calm, steps forward. His words demonstrate that he is in control. He is willing to go with the hostile mob.

Again Matthew indicates that Judas is 'one of the twelve'. Judas had walked with Jesus, seen the miracles and heard the amazing teaching. Now he was the traitor who led the large crowd to arrest the Son of God. Whatever his motives, it seems monstrous that he could do this. However, it is easy for us to lose faith in tough times and to think that we know a better way. At such times, we forget that the Lord God is above all human wisdom and endeavour. God's plans are always best for his people (Jeremiah 29:11).

Prayer

Lord of All, how sad that Jesus was betrayed by one of his own disciples. Help me to be a loyal disciple of Jesus. Help me to stand firm in my faith and support those who are working to spread the gospel. Help me not to be discouraged when things don't work out the way I expect. Please keep me reading your word and in step with the Holy Spirit. Amen

Day 5: Read Matthew 26: 50-56

Exploring the Passage

1. Why do you think the Sanhedrin sent a large crowd armed with swords and clubs?

2. What does Jesus say about using a sword to defend him? What power does Jesus have at his disposal?

3. What important fact have the enemies of Jesus missed? (V56)

Explaining the Passage

Jesus tells Peter to put away his sword (John 18:10-11). Confronted by their violence and aware of the cross ahead of him, Jesus takes another opportunity to point his hostile audience to the word of God. They are not in charge of events. This has all been written down long ago by prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. So, Jesus our Saviour is carried off into the night, while his disciples disappear into the shadows. Remember, we owe it all to Jesus alone. He was prepared to do the will of God the Father for us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I confess I am like the sheep in Isaiah 53:6. I have gone astray. I have turned to my own way. But Lord, you have laid all my sins upon the Lord Jesus. In your mercy, you have forgiven my sins and given me your peace. Help me to live for you. Amen

Week 4: The Truth on Trial - Matthew 26:57-75

57 Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. 58 But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. 59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward 61 and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" 62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" 63 But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." 64 "You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.

67 Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him 68 and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"

69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. 71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." 74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Day 1: Read Matthew 26: 57-63

Exploring the Passage

1. Who presides over this court and what is its purpose?
2. What details of the trial reveal its prejudice?
3. What is the only thing the two witnesses can say against Jesus?

Explaining the Passage

This court led by Caiaphas is made up of a number of the chief priests and officials from the Temple. They intend to condemn Jesus to death. They find two witnesses who report Jesus' words about destroying the Temple. John records that the Pharisees scoffed when Jesus spoke about destroying the Temple in three days. Then John explains that Jesus was referring to his death and resurrection. John adds that the disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant until after he was raised from the dead (John 2: 18-22).

Jesus was saying something new which threatened the power of the religious leaders. The Temple was the centre of Jewish worship. It was God's dwelling place with his people. From his birth, Jesus is known as Emmanuel (God with us). The sacrifices for sins offered in the Temple would be replaced forever by the blood of Jesus. The High Priest presses Jesus for an explanation but Jesus remains silent.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you alone are holy. You judge the nations with righteousness. Yet, you allowed the Son of God to stand before corrupt human judges. Please help our Christian brothers and sisters in countries where they are persecuted for their faith. Comfort them in their distress and help them to keep trusting in you. Amen

Day 2: Read Matthew 26: 62-64

Exploring the Passage

1. What do you learn from Jesus' reply to the High Priest?

2. What verdict does the court give and why?

Explaining the Passage

Since the court does not accept that Jesus is the Messiah, there is no way out for Jesus. If he refuses to answer the charge, he is condemned. If he says he is not the Messiah, all his teachings are lies. If he claims to be the Messiah, he will be condemned to death. Jesus declares boldly that he is the Messiah.

Imagine the court's reaction when Jesus quotes a familiar prophecy about the coming of the Messiah (Daniel 7:13). What a wonderful description of the future glory of the Lord Jesus! Previously, Jesus used these words to provide reassurance to the disciples, when he described the dark times of devastation and persecution ahead of them (Matthew 24:30). No matter what troubles we are going through, this is God's promise to us as well. The Lord Jesus will return. He is *coming on the clouds of heaven*.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to understand the meaning of your Son's death and resurrection and teach me to reflect it in my life. Help me to love you and love my neighbour. May I be ready for that day when the Lord Jesus will come on the clouds of heaven. Amen

Day 3: Read Matthew 26: 65-68

Exploring the Passage

1. Why does the court condemn Jesus?

2. How would you describe the treatment that Jesus receives?

Explaining the Passage

As soon as Jesus declared he was the Christ or Messiah, the High Priest tore his robe and said, '*He has spoken blasphemy*'. This Hebrew custom, like putting ashes on your head, was a way to display strong emotions, especially grief. However, as High Priest, Caiaphas was forbidden to tear his clothes (Leviticus 21:10). The irony of his words and actions underline how far the religious leaders had fallen. They all condemn Jesus and subject him to insults and violence.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus! How it must have hurt you to receive this treatment from the religious leaders on that dreadful day! You were despised and rejected by those who should have received you as the promised Messiah. Help me never to doubt your words. Give me the courage to defend your honour with my testimony. Amen

Day 4: Read Matthew 26: 69-75

Exploring the Passage

1. Why do you think Peter denies he knows Jesus?
2. At this point is Peter any different to Judas?
3. What causes Peter's grief?

Explaining the Passage

As a concession to Peter's later role as an Apostle, this event could have been omitted. It is included because the New Testament is a reliable historical account of the life and death of Jesus. It is not fiction or political propaganda. Although there are some small variations across the Gospels, the main facts are clear and would have come from Peter himself. Peter denies Jesus three times, *before them all* and *with an oath*. It is just as Jesus predicted. Peter, usually so brave and bold, goes away and weeps.

Many years later, Peter will encourage the early churches to stand firm, with these words: *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* (1 Peter 3: 15)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I am sorry for the times when I have failed to speak up for Jesus, my Saviour. I don't want you to be ashamed of me. I know it is my sins of fear and pride that prevent me from trusting you in this. Please help me to look for opportunities to share the good news, with the help of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Week 5: Justice - Matthew 27:1-31

27 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. ² So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. ⁶ The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.” ⁷ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. ⁸ That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, ¹⁰ and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”

¹¹ Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “You have said so,” Jesus replied.

¹² When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” ¹⁴ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. ¹⁵ Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶ At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” ¹⁸ For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him. ¹⁹ While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. ²¹ “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered.

²² “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked.

They all answered, “Crucify him!” ²³ “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

²⁴ 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!” ²⁵ All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!” ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Day 1: Read Matthew 27: 1-2

Exploring the Passage

1. When do the Sanhedrin make their decision to have Jesus executed?

2. Who is Jesus handed over to?

Explaining the Passage

Pilate became Procurator in AD 26. As Governor of the small, difficult province of Judea and Samaria, Pilate had absolute power over life and death of all his subjects. Pilate had little sympathy for the religion and culture of the Jews. He seized Korban money (dedicated to God), in order to build an aqueduct. He quelled a riot, by sending soldiers to kill the protesters. Pilate often came to Jerusalem during the Jewish Festivals in case of trouble.

The Sanhedrin may have waited until daybreak to pass the sentence in order to make it legal. Certainly, they wasted no time in coming to their decision. In order to carry out the death penalty, they are forced to hand Jesus over to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. So, Romans, Jews, and even the disciples, play a part in putting Jesus to death.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I will never know how much you suffered even as you were dragged from court to court, rejected and abused. Yet you came to seek and save the lost. Thank you for your perfect sacrifice. In return, I can only acknowledge my sin, offer my thanks that are feeble and my service that is weak. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen

Day 2: Read Matthew 27: 3-10

Exploring the Passage

1. How does Judas feel when he sees that Jesus is condemned to death?
2. Why do you think he returns the money to the chief priests? How do they respond to the remorse of Judas?
3. What do they decide to do with the money?

Explaining the Passage

Judas speaks on behalf of all those who were involved in the false trials and crucifixion of Jesus when he utters those sad words, 'I have sinned for I have betrayed innocent blood.' The chief priests show they have no concern for Judas. They offer him no way of absolving himself from his dreadful betrayal of the Lord. Instead of returning to his friends, Judas takes his own life.

Meanwhile, the chief priests debate about what to do with the blood money. They have failed to live up to their high calling. They have condemned the Son of God to death. Yet, with typical hypocrisy, they are scrupulous about keeping the law when spending the money. In this pathetic situation, it is God who has the last word. Even the purchase of the potter's field for foreign burials is mentioned in the Prophets (Zechariah 11: 12-13 and Jeremiah 19: 1-13). God's plan is that Jesus would die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5: 8)

Prayer

Almighty God and Father, your loving purposes cannot be frustrated by human wickedness. When the Lord Jesus suffered and died, he provided the only way of salvation. He gave his life so that I might live. I am sorry that so often I fail to do what I know I should. Help me to serve you with my whole heart. Amen

Day 3: Read Matthew 27: 11-14

Exploring the Passage

1. Why do you think Pilate asked Jesus whether he is the King of the Jews?

2. What surprises Pilate in this encounter with Jesus?

Explaining the Passage

The Roman Governor, aware of his own authority, begins with a direct question. If Jesus is accused of treason against Rome, has he made himself King? Jesus answers, 'Yes' but keeps silent when the chief priests and the elders announce the charges. Pilate is not convinced that Jesus deserves the death penalty. Hearing that Jesus is from Galilee, Pilate sends Jesus to King Herod (Luke 23: 8-12). After being mocked by Herod and his soldiers, Jesus is sent back to Pilate.

The silence and self-control of Jesus surprises Pilate. He probably expects a different reaction from an accused revolutionary. However, Jesus knows that his hour has come and he is the Passover Lamb. He submits silently to his accusers exactly as Isaiah predicted: ...he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53 7)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to be like Your Son Jesus, who loved the world and died for our salvation. Inspire me by his love and guide me by his example. Amen

Day 4: Read Matthew 27:15-26

Exploring the Passage

1. What evidence is there that Pilate wanted to release Jesus?
2. Why did the crowd shout, 'Crucify him!'
3. Why did Pilate wash his hands in front of the crowd?
4. How did the crowd react?

Explaining the Passage

As the sun rises higher in the sky, Jesus is surrounded by people whose hearts are hardened by sin. Matthew provides us with important clues to the monstrous evil that prevails:

Pilate offers to release Jesus but the crowd would rather have a notorious prisoner. Barabbas is wanted for insurrection in the city and murder according to Luke. (Luke 23: 19) The chief priests and the elders actively persuaded the crowd to make this choice. Pilate's wife describes Jesus as an innocent man. Pilate indicates that Jesus is called Christ. There is no longer any attempt to gloss over human responsibility. The crowd shouts, 'Crucify him!' and 'Let his blood be on our heads'. Although Pilate washes his hands, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood', he gives the order for Jesus to be flogged and crucified.

If we had been among that angry crowd, would we have shouted, 'the blood of Jesus be on our heads'? The irony is that our sins can only be forgiven through the blood of Jesus. When people are doing their worst, God is providing the way of salvation.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you all your goodness and mercy to me. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for showing us how to live a perfect life. You are the only true innocent man. No one else could take the punishment for sin. Thank you that you shed your blood to cleanse me from all my sins. Help me to follow you. Amen.

Day 5: Read Matthew 27: 27 - 31

Exploring the Passage

1. What kingly symbols are used in the cruel mockery of Jesus?

2. Why do you think the soldiers did this?

Explaining the Passage

Now, the soldiers in the Praetorium (the Governor's Residence), take another step further into the depths of human depravity. Although the Gospel writers don't elaborate on the flogging of Jesus, there is plenty of external evidence for the brutality of this punishment. It was meant to tear the flesh from the victim's naked body and leave them almost dead.

At some point, the soldiers decided to mock and torture Jesus. They stripped him and dressed him roughly in the crown, cloak and staff of a king. The scarlet cloak was part of the soldier's uniform. They spat on him and hit him with the staff. Everything they did was intended to hurt and disgrace him. Yet, Jesus bore it all with dignity and the cruel crown of thorns became a lasting symbol of his agony and sacrifice.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we know that Jesus suffered and died, so that we could be healed through his wounds. If I suffer because I am a Christian, help me to follow the example of Jesus, who committed no sin and spoke only the truth. Help me to die to sin and live for righteousness. Amen

Week 6: Justice - Matthew 27: 32- 66

³² As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him [Jesus] to carry the cross. ³³ They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). ³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. ³⁵ When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. ³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

³⁸ Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” ⁴⁴ In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

⁴⁵ 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?”).

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.” ⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵² and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” ⁵⁵ Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. ⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

⁵⁷ As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹ 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. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

⁶² The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³ “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’” ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”

⁶⁵ “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Day 1: Read Matthew 27: 32 - 36

Exploring the Passage

1. Why do you think Simon was forced to carry the cross?

2. What part do the Roman soldiers play in the crucifixion?

Explaining the Passage

Matthew does not write much about the pain and agony of the crucifixion. Jesus is weak from the flogging and Simon is ordered to carry the heavy cross-bar to Golgotha. Mark adds that Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus, suggesting that he was known to those reading his Gospel (Mark 15: 21). Jesus refuses the drink of wine vinegar handed to him by the mocking soldiers. Then he is crucified. Another prophecy is fulfilled as the soldiers divide up his clothing.

Crucifixion is a slow and painful death. Matthew notes that the soldiers remain on guard. There is no possibility that Jesus' friends could rescue him. He died on the cross for us.

Prayer

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. (Isaiah 53: 5-6)

Praise to the Lord Jesus, our Saviour! Amen

Day 2: Read Matthew 27: 37-44

Exploring the Passage

1. What is the meaning of the words written on the cross?

2. List the people who insulted Jesus as he suffered on the cross.

3. What is the main focus of these insults?

Explaining the Passage

John records that it was Pilate who gave the orders for the words, ‘*The King of the Jews*’ to be written on the cross. When the chief priests objected, Pilate refused to change them (John 19:19-22). So the words announced, in part, show that Jesus was the promised Messiah and King, the descendant of King David, whose kingdom would last forever. No one was prepared for this King of Kings to be crucified.

Clearly, the chief priests thought this would be the end of Jesus as Messiah. His followers would scatter and his teachings would be forgotten. They joined in with all the others who hurled insults at Jesus. Even the two robbers, crucified with him, used what little breath they had, to insult Jesus. They all failed to understand the purpose of his suffering. He could not save himself because he was offering himself as a sacrifice for all their sins.

Prayer

Merciful God, you made all men and women and hate nothing that you have made, nor do you desire the death of a sinner but rather that they should be converted and live. Have mercy on all who do not know you or who deny the faith of Christ crucified. Take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of your word. Blessed Lord, bring them home to your fold, so they may become one flock, under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen

(Book of Common Prayer, Good Friday)

Day 3: Read Matthew 27: 45-50

Exploring the Passage

1. How long did the darkness last?
2. Why did Jesus cry out, '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*'
3. How did the crowd react?
4. What is the meaning of the words, *he gave up his spirit?*

Explaining the Passage

At noon, darkness fell on the land. There was no light because the wrath of God had fallen upon his only Son (it is as if The Father has turned his faced away from The Son). Suddenly, Jesus cries out the words of desolation taken from Psalm 22:1. As he takes on the sins of the world, he is utterly cut off from God the Father. Unaware that they are witnesses to the climax of God's plan of salvation, those looking on are confused. Someone offers a moist sponge to his dry lips. Despite the agony he suffers, Jesus is able to cry out again in a loud voice and then, *he gave up his spirit*. Matthew is stating clearly that Jesus is in control until his very last breath. He had paid the price for all our sins and so he died.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, it was my sin that held you there on the cross. I cannot comprehend how much you suffered for the sins of the world. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. Amen

Day 4: Read Matthew 27: 51-56

Exploring the Passage

1. What strange events occurred at the time of Jesus' death?
2. How did the centurion and the soldiers respond?
3. Who are the witnesses watching from a distance?

Explaining the Passage

With the death of the Son of God, the land is shaken by an earthquake. Within the Temple, the veil is ripped, unnaturally, from top to bottom. The veil separated the holiest room from the outer courts. It is a sign that the ritual of priesthood and sacrifice has ended. Jesus is now the only way to God. The death of Jesus signals the beginning of new life. Jesus himself will soon rise from the dead. Already, the power of sin and death is broken, the tombs break open and holy people come alive. Matthew states this amazing fact without adding any explanation. Even those who are already dead will come to life because of Jesus' sacrifice for sin. He does add that there are many witnesses who saw them.

It is the Centurion and the soldiers with him, who recognise that something huge is happening. They are terrified and exclaim, '*Surely he was the Son of God!*' In addition, Matthew notes the faithful women who watched from a distance. They must have been heart-broken and horrified as they saw the one they loved suffer and die.

Prayer

Almighty God, what power was unleashed when Jesus took his last earthly breath! Through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, you forgive my sins and allow me to come to your throne. You are the Most High God, yet I can call you my Heavenly Father. I know that nothing can separate me from your love and your mercy. Lord Jesus, You are the Son of God, forever and ever. Amen.

Day 5: Read Matthew 27: 57-66

Exploring the Passage

1. How does Joseph of Arimathea care for the body of Jesus?
2. Who watched beside the tomb?
3. Why do the chief priests and elders want the tomb guarded?
4. How do they secure the tomb?

Explaining the Passage

Joseph of Arimathea is an example of a rich man who became a follower of Jesus (Matthew 19:23). Pilate gives Joseph permission to remove the body of Jesus. Joseph wraps the body in clean linen cloth and lays it in his own tomb. The grieving women watch silently. It was forbidden to mourn someone who has committed treason against Rome.

The chief priests and elders are still worried. They ask permission to guard the tomb in case the disciples try to steal the body and *pretend* Jesus has risen from the dead. Pilate must have been amused at all the fuss. The Roman soldiers had made sure the man was dead. The guarded tomb provides the reader with more proof that what occurred next was no human kidnap but a divine resurrection.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to follow you with devotion and courage like Joseph of Arimathea. Help me to step out of my comfort zone and be identified as a disciple of Jesus. Help me to offer my wealth, my talents and my time to support my church in the mission to tell people about Jesus. Amen

Week 7: Hope - Matthew 28:1-20

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ 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. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Day 1: Read Matthew 28:1-4

Exploring the Passage

1. Who arrives at the tomb?
2. What does the Angel do upon arriving at the tomb?
3. Why did the Angel roll back the stone (clearly the stone did not prevent Jesus from rising!)?

Explaining the Passage

Mark tells us that the women were bringing spices to anoint the body of Jesus and were anxious about moving the heavy stone away (Mark 16:2-4). Like many ancient writers, Matthew sometimes rearranges the sequence of events to fit his purposes. After making it clear that the women were the first to come to the tomb, he goes back to describe the spectacular events that have already happened. Matthew focuses on the dazzling appearance of the Angel of the Lord, suggesting that the violent earthquake accompanied his arrival. The Angel terrified the soldiers so much that they deserted their post and fled.

Clearly, the tomb was already empty when the Angel arrived. Unlike Lazarus, Jesus didn't need to wait for someone to let him out. Later, Jesus would appear to the disciples inside a room when the doors were locked. The Angel rolled back the heavy stone so it was easy for the witnesses to go inside. The Day of the Risen Lord had begun!

Prayer

Almighty God, You are the Maker and the Judge of us all. Thank you for raising Jesus from the dead and giving us the gift of eternal life. Remind me today of your mighty resurrection power. When things happen that I don't understand, help me to not to run away from you in fear. Help me to come to you, as a faithful follower of Jesus. Teach me, Lord Jesus, to trust and obey. Amen

Day 2: Read Matthew 28: 5-10

Exploring the Passage

1. What were the main points of the Angel's message?
2. Where would the disciples see the Risen Lord Jesus?
3. Why do you think the women experienced both fear and joy?
4. What message does Jesus have for them?

Explaining the Passage

How amazing for these women to hear the good news directly from the Angel of the Lord. Look again at the Angel's message to them. First, the Angel knows that they are looking for *Jesus, who was crucified*. There is no doubt that Jesus was dead and they are at the right tomb. This is a factual, historical account of something beyond human imagination. The Lord Jesus has risen from the dead. Secondly, the Angel tells the women that he has risen, *just as he said*. The words of Jesus are always true (Matthew 24:35). Thirdly, the Angel invites the women to check *the place where he lay*. They are the first to see that the tomb is empty. Finally, the women are told to: *'Go quickly and tell his disciples..'*

Then, these women have the absolute joy of meeting the Risen Lord Jesus. They fall at his feet and worship him.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have conquered death through your dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant us by your grace to set our minds on things above, so that by your continual help our whole life may be transformed, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit in everlasting glory. Amen
(Book of Common Prayer, Easter Day)

Day 3: Read Matthew 28:11-15

Exploring the Passage

1. What do you think motivates the deceitful plan of the chief priests?
2. What was strange about the plan they made? (Compare Matt 27:64)
3. Why do you think the soldiers were willing to spread the fake news?
4. What was the result of the soldiers' story?

Explaining the Passage

Matthew again points out the wicked hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Obviously, the chief priests are shocked by the report from the soldiers. Apparently, none of the leaders went to the tomb to check the facts. To protect their own positions of authority, they bribe the soldiers to spread fake news that the disciples have stolen the body. Perhaps they took the large sum of money from the Temple funds (compare Matt 27: 6).

Prayer

God of Mercy, thank you for redeeming me through the blood of the Lord Jesus. Thank you for washing away my sin and giving me new birth in the Holy Spirit. As our church celebrates the resurrection of Christ, please remind me of all these blessings. Fill me with your Holy Spirit so I can declare your praises. Amen

Day 4: Read Matthew 28:16-20

Exploring the Passage

1. Where does this meeting take place?
2. What command does Jesus give to his disciples?
3. What does Jesus promise them?

Explaining the Passage

Matthew records a special appearance of Jesus with his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Matthew writes that most of those present worship Jesus but some hesitate. Thomas had doubted at first (John 20: 24-28). This could be the occasion when a crowd of 500 saw Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:6). It is hard for any of us to grasp that Jesus who was crucified is our Risen Lord.

It is beautiful that the Risen Lord *came to them*. Jesus commands them to go to all nations, to make disciples and baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is how the good news spreads from a small group of Jewish disciples to the church of God through all generations and nations until Christ's Return. These instructions should always be at the heart of everything we do both individually and as a church. With this commission comes a promise that Jesus will be with his disciples always. This promise must include future disciples, like us, because he adds, '*to the very end of the age*', that is until he returns.

Prayer

God our Father, as we go about our daily activities, help us to share the good news. May the Holy Spirit, sent to the Apostles to begin the teaching of the gospel, continue to work in the world, through the hearts of all who believe. Lord Jesus, help us to hold onto the promise that you are with us always. Amen