

The word "Easter" is written in a blue, cursive script font. It is surrounded by several decorative, light grey swirls of varying sizes, some positioned above and some to the sides of the letters.

Easter

a 7 day devotional



EDMONTON
WORSHIP CENTER

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Introduction

The days that we are living in are unique to us, yet the Bible tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. Others have lived in similar times and those times came and they passed. There is one thing that remains the same, constant and unchanging: God. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

As we face the Coronavirus pandemic this Easter season, it will be an Easter like we have never seen before in some aspects. At the same time, Easter remains the same. It is a season of hope. A time of remembering and celebrating our great Savior's victory over sin, death, and hell. Christ has overcome all and through Him we are more than conquerors! Life has swallowed up death and the Light has broken through and dispelled the darkness! So, while this period in our lives and the world may seem dark, Easter is a welcomed beam of hope.

This 7 day devotion is meant to be used for the 7 days leading up to Easter Sunday. It begins on Palm Sunday and goes through the Holy Week. Each day there is a Scripture reference for you to read and then a devotional thought to encourage you and help center your mind and heart on Jesus.

There will also be a short video that goes with each day's devotion on our website, www.edmontonworshipcenter.com. The video will be available on each corresponding day to go along with your devotional time. You can also find an activity guide there to download for your kids.

I hope you'll use this during Holy Week individually or with your family and that it will encourage you to keep your eyes on Jesus and worship Him in spirit and truth. May God bless and keep you.

Bro. Robbie

Palm Sunday

Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, promotions... all these are things that we celebrate. We gather, we hold ceremonies, we eat and drink, we give gifts all to honor these different occasions. We like to celebrate, we enjoy it, we might even love it. Many of these things that we celebrate are dear to our hearts and stir great emotion within us.

Many of us have been missing celebrating some of these things while we've been having to practice social distancing, and that may be weighing really heavy on you. If that's where you are, it's ok. It's only right that we should feel disappointed at not being able to celebrate some of the milestones and achievements in our lives and the lives of those we love.

When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday there was an amazing celebration. The disciples gave up their robes for Jesus to sit on, people cut down palm branches or laid their robes down in the street to create a "red carpet" of sorts for Jesus to ride in on. Then they began to shout and to praise God. These people were excited, ecstatic even! They were celebrating!

It was right for them to celebrate. I don't think that they fully grasped what was going on. The Bible says that they were celebrating and shouting and praising God for all the miracles that they had seen. But there was so much more taking place here. The Messiah was entering Zion! The King of kings and Lord of lords was receiving the hero's welcome that He deserved. The Son of the Living God was being hailed. In fact, it was so right, that when the Pharisees told Jesus to make the people stop all their celebrating, He said that if they were to be quiet the stones would cry out in their place! In Matthew's account, chapter 21 says that the city was shaken! Imagine such praise that the city was shaken by it!

Jesus was worthy and Jesus *is* worthy. Let that sink in for a second... Jesus *is* worthy. Even though there is a pandemic, Jesus *is* worthy! Even though we may not be able to celebrate other things the way we would like, Jesus *is* worthy! Even if we don't get to gather in person to celebrate Easter, Jesus *is* worthy! Even though life looks different than it ever has before, Jesus *is* worthy! Your Messiah has come! Your King is seated on His throne! And He *is* worthy!

So, praise Him! Thank Him! Shout for joy because of Him! Don't let the rocks cry out for you. Have a glad heart and celebrate Jesus today and this week. And as we praise Jesus in the middle of this storm, those around us will see it. The world needs to see us celebrating even if the day is dark and it just might be that it would be shaken by seeing such rejoicing in the middle of such despair. It just might be that someone's world might be shaken, and their life forever changed by coming to know this Messiah who is so worthy that His followers praise Him even in deep adversity.

Light shines brightest in the dark, so let your light shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Believe

When I was a little boy, I could tell some unbelievable tales. One day when I was in 1st grade I came home and told my parents that I had been swimming that day at school. I explained that the school had set up a swimming pool on the playground and everyone could go swimming in it. To call my bluff, my parents asked me where everyone got a bathing suit. Without missing a beat, I told them that the school had provided one for everybody. This went on all week and my parents just kind of played along. Finally, on Friday afternoon they said they wanted to load up and drive to school and see this great swimming pool that I had told them so much about and my tall tale came to an end as I admitted the truth.

Sometimes there are things that are just hard to believe and then there are times when it is just hard to believe. Today's passage urges us to believe. As Jesus' journey toward both unbelievable tragedy on the cross and unbelievable victory in the empty tomb takes us a step closer to Easter, we can believe!

This doesn't just mean that we can believe in the reality of the resurrection. Although there is no truer historical fact. If you believe that Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492... you should believe that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the grave!

But this encourages us to trust Him. There was a dad who came to Jesus' disciples and wanted them to cast a demon out of his son. They found themselves unable to do it and when the case was brought to Jesus, Jesus looked at this father and asked if he believed that Jesus was able to do this thing. The dad's answer resonates with all of us on some level. He said, "I believe. Help my unbelief." It's ok to admit that sometimes we have trouble trusting God for this or that. Maybe it isn't that we don't believe He can do something but that we have trouble believing that He will.

Verse 23 of today's passage begins with Jesus saying, "I assure you". This is a unique phrase that is only used by Jesus and not by anyone else in the entire Bible. He said this to convey the absolute, concrete reliability of His words. In other words, here is the promise of Jesus.

As we approach the most sacred and amazing day on the Christian calendar, this is a time to believe. This is a time to trust God. Especially in the middle of the pandemic we're facing. You don't have to worry, trust the Lord! You don't have to be afraid, trust the Lord! You may not know what tomorrow will bring, but that is ok, trust the Lord. Take a deep breath and remember that mountain moving belief is not about having great belief, it is about your belief being in a Great God!

The Last Supper

“When We All Get to Heaven”, “Mansion Over the Hilltop”, “Beulah Land” Heaven’s Jubilee”, “I Can Only Imagine,” the list could go on and on of songs that have been written about heaven. There are amazing things that will be in heaven, from streets of gold to pearly gates. We’ll see loved ones who have gone on before us. Of all the amazing sights that heaven contains, Jesus is the greatest. He is the crowning jewel of glory. In fact, without Jesus heaven would be a place of darkness. See the Bible says that there is no need for sun or moon there and everything is illuminated by Christ Himself. (Revelation 21:23)

Those who have heard the Savior calling and had their life transformed by the power of the gospel long to be with Jesus. We want to hear His voice say, “Well done”. We want to hold the nail-scarred hands that bought our salvation. Nothing will be greater than finally and forever being in the physical presence of our Lord. But has it ever occurred to you that Jesus wants to be with you?

I’m not just saying that He loves you or wants you to be in heaven rather than hell. That’s true, but I mean that He wants to be with you as much, more even, than you want to be with Him. He left heaven to come to us and become one of us. He gave Himself to redeem us. He wants to be with you and went to incredible lengths in order for that to happen.

In verse 15 of today’s passage He tells His disciples that He has fervently desired to eat this Passover with them. Those closest to Him were together and they were eating a meal that served to remind them and commemorate when God rescued the people of Israel from Egypt and set them free. That act and that meal were foreshadowing what was about to take place on the cross. God was about to rescue His people again and set them free from sin. God brought them out of Egypt to bring them into the Promised Land. Now He was about to bring them out of the bondage of the devil and into the glorious kingdom of God!

Jesus had a burning desire to eat this last Passover meal with these that He loved so much not only to be with them but because it was also the final occurrence of this meal. Now he would go to the cross and make the way so that multiplied millions could come to Him and He could be with them! In place of this meal to remember God rescuing people from Egypt, Jesus instituted what we call the Lord’s Supper, commemorating His body being broken and His blood being shed on the cross. The Passover pointed back to what God had done, but also forward to what Jesus would do. The Lord’s Supper also points back. Back to what Jesus did for us on the cross and as often as we share it, we do it in remembrance of Him. But it also points forward. Forward to the day that we will forever be together.

Today remember that Jesus wants you and wants to be with you so desperately that He literally went to hell and back for you! There is a great day coming that we’ll be together for all time.

In the Garden

Adrenaline. It surges through us when we're scared or excited. It can cause us to momentarily run faster, hit harder, or jump farther than we otherwise could. It produces that fight or flight response in us. We have within us this nature system that will not allow us to just lay down and give up.

Sadly, we have the same thing within us spiritually. By nature, our fallen sin nature, we do not lay down or give up easily. Our flesh, not our skin and muscles, but what the Bible calls the old man, our fallen sinful nature, does not go down without a fight. It will actually fight and claw against God and His ways. When we get saved, God gives us a new nature, but the old one is still there in us. It is always fighting against the new.

If you've been a Christian for any time at all you know what that fight feels like. We want to follow God and walk in His ways and please Him and at the same time we are drawn away from Him and tempted to leave and go into sin. Jesus says something in verse 30 of today's passage that really speaks to this. He says, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

You see, Jesus became one of us. The Bible says that He was tempted in every way just like us and was still without sin. Jesus endured a battle in the garden that tore at Him so strongly that his sweat became great drops of blood! He was in emotional turmoil, mental anguish, and spiritual agony. If you ever feel torn between right and wrong, God's way or the way of sin, know that Jesus knows how that feels.

Personally, I know that feeling well and I also know all too well what it feels like to choose sin rather than God's way. I don't want to sin and I'm sure you don't either, but I find myself choosing it over, and over again. I always regret it and I'm so thankful that God is so gracious and faithful to forgive us.

But Jesus didn't sin, instead He surrendered. He prayed, "Not what I will, but what You will." Jesus surrendered Himself to God's will. I believe this is where the battle for Calvary was fought. Had there been no surrender in the garden, there would have been no suffering on the cross. Nor would there have been salvation for sinners like me and you.

We have to follow Jesus' example and surrender to our Father. I think the only way to do that is also to follow Christ's example and have a deep and intimate relationship with the Father. It was Jesus' habit to get away and spend intimate time alone with God. Sometimes He would rise early before dawn. Other times He would stay up late into the wee hours of the morning. Jesus made that time with God a priority and so must we if we want to walk with God and in His ways. Jesus is weeping and pouring out His heart to His Father here but the disciples, on the other hand, were sleeping. Jesus even told them to wake up and pray so that they wouldn't enter into temptation.

Later, when the crowd came to arrest Jesus, Jesus was ready to walk in God's will, but the disciples all ran away. Spend time "in the garden" with God so you can live a life that you surrendered to God.

Where's the Power?

I'm kind of a DIY-er. (You can learn to do just about anything on YouTube!). But there is one thing that I don't mess with... electricity. If it goes much past changing a wall outlet, I'm out. There's so much about it I don't really understand. I know it comes from the powerlines, through the breaker box, and to the outlet; but that is about it. I know if I need power I can go to the outlet, but the power doesn't come from the outlet, it just flows through it. The power doesn't even come from the powerlines, it just flows through them. But ultimately the source of the power comes from somewhere where it is generated.

When Jesus refused to answer Pilate, Pilate asked Jesus if He understood that he had the power to turn him loose or to crucify Him. Jesus' answer was one of absolute confidence. He told Pilate that the only power he had was what had been given to him from above. In other words, all of Pilate's power or authority, really came from God. Pilate was like the wall outlet; all his power came from somewhere else.

Here is the great truth to hang on to: power, all power, comes from God. He is omnipotent, or all-powerful. He is the Lord God Almighty!

He is the One who spoke the planets into existence. He called forth the light out of the darkness. He carved a dry path through the Red Sea so His people could cross over on dry land. He fed them with manna in the wilderness every morning for forty years. He led them into the Promised Land and drove out greater and mightier nations of people to give it to them as a possession. He caused a young virgin to become pregnant. He took on flesh and came into this world as one of us. He worked miracles, calmed storms and walked on water. Demons, disease, and even death must flee at His command! There is none like Him! None can rise above Him! None can overthrow Him or stand before Him! He is the uncaused first Cause and the Sovereign Ruler of all creation!

The greatest demonstration of God's infinite power is the resurrection of His Son, Jesus. In the resurrection, God shows His power over sin, over death itself, and over all the powers of Hell! Jesus was confident in front of Pilate because He knew that God is in control, He has the power. No matter what you're standing in front of, you can confidently stand in the same knowledge: God is in control! The power of the Risen Savior is our hope and peace.

The Cross

When my wife, Kara, and I got married we were able to buy a little house out in the country just five minutes or so from town. We took possession of it a week before our wedding and I went to work on it. I painted and worked and moved things, trying to get it ready for us to move into. After our wedding we went to our new home, ate turkey sandwiches, and spent our first night there together. We brought our first child home there from the hospital. Prayers were answered in that little house. We laughed and cried there.

There were so many memories in that little house. For instance, Kara was going to learn to play the piano. But we didn't have one and money was incredibly tight, but we managed to find an old one that someone had for sale and we bought it. It was one of those old upright pianos and it was so heavy that it felt like the bottom half was filled with concrete. It took 4 men to move it into our house and when we did it broke two floor joists! But she began to play it some. Many nights after we would eat supper, she would play it while I cleaned up the dishes and sang along to whatever she was playing. It became our routine and I loved it.

When I became a pastor and we moved out of that little house, it nearly broke our hearts. We hadn't been able to sell the house and couldn't afford for it to sit empty, so we rented it out. Every time we would go back there to deal with something while renting it, we got emotional. It meant so much to us and symbolized so much in our lives that couldn't keep ourselves from being overwhelmed and letting the tears roll.

If there is one thing that means so much it overwhelms us and symbolizes our faith as Christians it must be the cross. The songs and hymns written about that "Old Rugged Cross" are innumerable. There are libraries of books written about it. It is our spiritual birthplace. Every child of God has stood at the foot of the cross, stained with sin, and been washed whiter than snow in the blood of Jesus! It was there that we first "saw the light!"

The cross depicts the unfathomable love of God for broken and wayward human beings. It is unthinkable, unimaginable, that the three times Holy God would love wicked sinners at all; but that He would love us so much that He would give His precious, beloved Son for us... there aren't words to describe it!

It was on that cross that our Savior suffered for us. There that His body was broken, and His blood was shed. There the wrath and judgment of God against our sin was poured out onto our Messiah. There, the sky turned dark as the Father turned away from His Son and Jesus cried out "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" I know why. I am why... and so are you.

The In Between

In film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, Pippin stands on a balcony with Gandalf as the city waits to be attacked by the armies of Mordor. Pippin mentions how quiet it is and Gandalf tells him it is the deep breath before the plunge. Pippin says, "I don't want to be in a battle, but waiting on the edge of one I can't escape is even worse."

Waiting can be one of the hardest things that we ever do. We can become anxious, fearful, and full of doubt when we're waiting for what is to come.

Jesus' followers have watched, horrified, as their Lord and Master, "the Son of the Living God" as Peter recognized Him, was brutally murdered. They had been so sure that He was the Messiah who would rescue them and restore the kingdom, and now He is dead. They took His body and buried it in a tomb. How could it be?

Their hearts were hurting and heavy. They were confused, dismayed, hopeless. Some of them had left everything to follow Him, now where would they go?

They didn't understand what would happen on Sunday morning. Jesus had told them, but they couldn't see. They were blind to it. Friday afternoon as Jesus hung, suspended, between heaven and earth, their world was torn apart. They didn't have the New Testament like we do. They couldn't read what we read.

The darkness that filled the land as Jesus' paid for our sins on the tree had faded from the sky, but it wasn't gone. It filled their hearts. There would have been hope for them on Saturday if only they understood what Sunday would bring! We look back to them and we read the Scriptures and we know. But even we go right from the burial to the empty tomb in only a few verses. But they were trapped in time, waiting for the earth to make its three revolutions. Do you ever think about this in between?

The cross has gone, but the empty tomb has not yet come. God's love is sure, but His power remains to be seen. I think of this sometimes in the darker seasons of my life. The times when tragedy, suffering, or hardship come but deliverance still tarries.

But we know something they didn't. We know what Sunday would bring. We know that the darkness is passing, and the Son of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings! We know that the death could not hold Him, and the grave could not keep Him! We know that the awful darkness was about to be blown from existence by the glorious light of the resurrection! We know that Friday has passed... and Sunday is coming!