

WEEK SEVEN

DAY ONE

"The signature of Jesus, the Cross, is the ultimate expression of God's love for the world." - Brennan Manning

Long before the Jewish leaders had Jesus arrested in the garden, they had determined to kill Him (John 11:47-54). However, the Jewish council did not have the right to execute prisoners, so it was necessary to get the cooperation and approval of the Roman government. This meant a visit to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

The events surrounding Jesus' encounter with Pontius Pilate were his final face-off against the Jewish leaders. Their self-righteous composure would turn to rage as the very government authority figure they hoped to champion their cause would continually refer to Jesus as their king. In his final moments, Jesus would again call out their use of religion as a means to control through judgment, condemnation and fear.

Jesus was born into poverty and died the death of a criminal. Words can hardly describe the amount of suffering and cruelty Jesus was subjected to. He was mocked, dressed with a makeshift robe and a crown of thorns. He was beaten and spat upon. In the end, he was subjected to the most painful and humiliating form of capital punishment available.

The venomous cries of the crowd, and the mocking voices of the soldiers, are the most sinister elements of the human heart on display. When we get truly honest with ourselves, we can see that this same darkness resides in all of us. Jesus' death on the cross was his final proclamation that the gospel of grace—not religion—is the ultimate need of the human heart. It is finished. Jesus offered himself as the humble, suffering king who delivers us from sin and death, freeing us to live a life as citizens of his kingdom—fully known, fully accepted and fully loved.

READ

John 19

REFLECT

1: What are the most meaningful sacrifices other people have made for you?

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2: Read about Jesus' sacrifice for us in John 19:17–42. What do you know about crucifixion that sheds light on the way he died? What do you learn about Jesus from his words and actions on the cross?

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3: Why did John write verse 35?

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RESPOND

Spend some time today listening to this hymn, and reflecting on the deep love of Jesus for you. Circle or underline the lyrics that stand out most to you today. (The song can be accessed on iTunes, Spotify or YouTube)

How Deep the Father's Love for Us || By Stuart Townend

How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That he should give his only Son
To make a wretch his treasure
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns his face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory

Behold the man upon a cross
My sin upon his shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection
Shy should I gain from his reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

PRAY

Pray this verse of Scripture today from Romans 5:8: *Thank you, God, for demonstrating your love for me in this: While I was still a sinner, Christ died for me.*

*"The symbol of Easter is the empty tomb.
You can't depict or domesticate emptiness." - Frederick Buechner*

The incredible events on Easter day were not immediately understood by Jesus' closest friends. They were grief-stricken and dumbfounded, trying to wrap their minds around the reality that their friend and teacher had died; and even worse, that his body was missing. In the eyes of Jesus' followers, his movement and mission were over.

From the beginning, the enemies of Jesus tried to deny the resurrection (Matthew 28:11-15). The Jewish leaders claimed his body had been stolen from the tomb. Since the tomb was guarded by Romans soldiers and closed with an official seal, that would have been impossible. Even more, his disciples did not believe he was raised from the dead. If his friends *could not* steal the body, and his enemies *would not* (the last thing they wanted anyone believing that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead), then who took it?

As the days progressed, Jesus started showing up to different groups of people at different times. It wasn't a ghost or a hallucination—it was Jesus, in the flesh. Finally, all of the words Jesus had spoken to them about how he would die and be raised from the dead made sense. It actually happened!

The movement of Jesus was just getting started. The gift of the promised Holy Spirit was here. Jesus was sending them out to continue his rescue mission, upheld by his presence and peace. Just like those early disciples, Jesus is still sending people out into the world to bring the life-changing message of salvation by grace. Where might he be sending you?

READ

John 20

REFLECT

1: What evidence is there in this passage that Jesus did indeed die and rise again?

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2: Do you spend time pursuing relationships with those who don't know Jesus? What have you learned from the way that Jesus interacts with people that could make this a little easier?

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3: In verse 31, John identifies the purpose of the whole book. What is it?

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WEEK SEVEN

DAY THREE

"Our old history ends with the cross; our new history begins with the resurrection." - Watchman Nee

After reading the incredible events of Jesus's resurrection and his charge to the disciples to carry on his mission of reaching the world with the message of grace, it is interesting that the author chose to include one more chapter. John could not end his gospel without telling one of the greatest redemption stories of all time.

While not recorded in the book of John, the interaction between Peter and Jesus in John 21 is almost identical to the conversation they had on the day they first met (Luke 5:1-11). In both accounts, Peter and his fishing partners set out and work all night without catching a single fish. Then, a strange man from the shore gives them a tip to shift their strategy and surprisingly, they listen. Within moments, they then bring in such a huge haul of fish that it nearly sinks their boat.

On that first day just three years before, Peter left everything to follow Jesus. Here, we see that he had returned to the very life he left behind. And while the author doesn't share the details of what Peter was thinking and feeling in this moment, there is a lot we can infer based on what we do know about Peter's life. Although Peter had seen Jesus with his own eyes, risen from the dead, he struggled to believe that the invitation to participate in the continuing movement of Jesus was really for him. The burden of his denial of Jesus weighed so heavily upon his heart that returning to his former life seemed like the only option he was worthy of.

As Peter looked into the eyes of Jesus and was asked again to care for his people, the message of grace took root in his heart in a way that would transform his entire life. This time, as he left everything to follow Jesus, he would become one of the front-runners of the first church.

There is no misstep, no mistake, no sin that could ever disqualify you from God's plan for your life. No matter how long you have known him or how far you have wandered, Jesus invites us to receive his grace and releases us to unleash his great love upon our world.

READ

John 21

REFLECT

1: Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. What differences do you see in him from what we read in John 21?

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2: How can this story encourage you in the moments you don't feel cut out for following Jesus?

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3: How does Jesus' response to Peter in this story tell you about how God responds to us when we fail?

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