

The Passion Week



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 11:1-11, John 13:1-17, 15:9-17.*

Memory Text: “**Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him**” (*John 13:31*).

A museum in Rome displays what might be the earliest picture of the Crucifixion. Unfortunately, it is a caricature, graffiti sketched on a wall. It's a drawing of a man, with a donkey's head, stretched out on a cross. Before the cross another man stands, his arms lifted in adoration. Below the picture these words, in Latin, were scribbled: “Alexander worships God.”

Though both Jews and Christians had been accused of donkey worship (the exact origins of that accusation is unknown), the derogatory nature of the picture should help us understand the shame associated with the Cross, something not easy for us to appreciate. After all, we adore the Cross, we sing songs about it, we place it on our churches, and we write books extolling it. Yet, how much sense does it make to worship a Man executed as a criminal in the most shameful and barbaric manner?

The answer, of course, is that it makes a lot of sense, once you understand who that Man was and what His death meant for the world.

The Week at a Glance: **Why did Jesus not stop the outpouring of support for Him during the triumphal entry? What was the attitude of a majority of Jews toward Jesus? What was the significance of the foot-washing ceremony?**

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 5.*

Outline of the Final Passover Week

About one-third of the material in the four Gospels deals explicitly with the final Passover week leading up to Christ's crucifixion and His resurrection. This material includes some parables of the kingdom and of future judgment.

Today's study presents a brief outline of the period often termed the Passion Week—from the Sunday or Monday prior to Christ's crucifixion to the following Sunday, when He was resurrected. In accordance with the Lord's original instructions, the Passover lamb was slain in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month (originally called *Abib* in Hebrew and later *Nisan*, which came in the early spring). (See *Exod. 12:1-6, 34:18, Esther 3:7*.)

Below is a quick outline of the high points:

Sunday (Nisan 9). The triumphal entry; Jesus' silent visit to the temple; and His return to Bethany.

Monday (Nisan 10). The fruitless fig tree cursed; second cleansing of the temple; Jesus heals the afflicted there; He returns to Bethany in the evening.

Tuesday (Nisan 11). Last day in the temple (Greek believers meet with Jesus in outer court); Jesus' last day of public teaching; woes against religious elite; retirement to Mount of Olives and discourse there on the Second Coming; Judas clinches betrayal bargain with priests that night.

Wednesday (Nisan 12). Jesus in quiet retirement with disciples.

Thursday (Nisan 13). Preparation for the Passover; the Lord's Supper; Judas's betrayal; Jesus' farewell discourse for disciples and high-priestly prayer; Gethsemane; His arrest. The events following the Lord's Supper were at sundown and afterwards; consequently, the day was now the fourteenth of Nisan, or Thursday night.

Friday (Nisan 14). Jesus led to Annas, then to Caiaphas, and then to Sanhedrin; Peter's denial; Jesus is brought to Pilate, then to Herod's palace, and back to Pilate. He is scourged, condemned, and crucified.

Carefully read John 15:9-17. Against the background of the Passion Week, Jesus focuses here on one point. What is it, why is it so appropriate (especially in light of the Cross), and what is the message for us? How can you make that point real in your own life?

Key Text: *John 12:32, 36.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the Passion Week for insights on salvation.
2. To present foot washing as a revelation of God's character.
3. To invite us to trust fully in God and to allow His will to direct our lives.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Journey to the Cross (*Mark 11:9*).

- A. Jesus came to do the Father's will—to rescue humankind.
- B. Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the time of the Passover celebration calls attention to His impending sacrifice.
- C. We are invited to join in the praise offered to our Redeemer.

II. Acceptance or Rejection? (*Acts 2:41*).

- A. Many followed Jesus while others feared His influence.
- B. Jesus enacts the character of God by washing the disciples' feet.
- C. We can reflect Jesus' service of love by following His example.

III. Thy Will Be Done (*Matt. 26:39, 42*).

- A. Satan attempted to discourage Jesus from completing His mission to rescue humankind.
- B. Gethsemane underscores the magnitude and the consequences of sin.
- C. We are invited to submit to the Father's will for our lives, as our Savior did.

Summary: During the week before Jesus' death on the cross, He cleanses the temple and rides triumphantly into Jerusalem. He wants the crowds to know of His death and resurrection. His desire is to save as many as would respond. Yet, even in the light of His obvious authority, power, and goodness, the religious leaders treat Him with contempt. His trial is noted for gross irregularities. The chief priests and rabbis do not seek the Truth but desire to do away with Him. Knowing all this would happen before it took place, Jesus washes the feet of His disciples, serving those who would misunderstand and desert Him. By a voluntary act, He gives Himself, submitting fully to the Father's will, so we might receive the blessing of eternal life.

COMMENTARY

The Passion Week.

Introduction. The week leading up to Christ's crucifixion is a richly instructive procession of events that magnify the Savior and illuminate His earthly mission so soon to culminate on Calvary. This week's overview of these events seeks to highlight the impor-

Triumphal Entry; the Temple Cleansed

(Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-48).

Read the story of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem in **Matthew 21:1-11** (see also **Mark 11:7-11, Luke 19:29-40**). **What was so different about how He interacted with the people here as opposed to when He multiplied the fish and the loaves?** (*John 6:15*).

Throughout most of His ministry, Jesus kept a fairly low profile. He didn't encourage large demonstrations of fealty and loyalty. Knowing, as He did, the hatred and animosity of the leaders, He worked in a way that allowed Him to complete His work of healing, teaching, and preaching.

Now, however, He allowed this demonstration, knowing that it would lead Him to the cross. Plus, with such crowds mounting and the interest in Him growing into a fervor, many more would know of His death and resurrection than would have had He kept a low profile.

What did Jesus do the next day and with what results? *Matt. 21:12-16*.

During the triumphal entry, some in the crowds had shouted, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (*Luke 19:38*). Christ's response to the Pharisees in the next few verses showed that not only did He acknowledge these acclamations and praises, He affirmed them. Then, as the Davidic king, the son of David, He cleanses the temple, calling it "My house" (*Matt. 21:13*), and as its rightful owner, He exercised His divine authority over it.

Thus, between the triumphal entry, the cleansing of the temple, and His final return to the temple, where He is challenged by the leaders (*Matt. 21:23-27*), Jesus, in an undeniable manner, has openly shown His own authority before the people and the religious teachers. In His own merciful way, He has given them even more evidence of who He was (see *Matt. 21:15*). The question now for them is, How would they respond?

Some leaders rejected Jesus because His claims threatened their power, prestige, and authority. In what ways do the claims of Jesus threaten your own power, prestige, and authority? How do you respond to those threats?

tant lessons Christ set forth regarding the meaning of His sacrifice and the glory that would follow.

I. Outline of the Final Passover Week.

Each of the events in the Passion Week is a critical element in the unfolding of the real-life drama that delineates the irreconcilable differences between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. No week in human history has been so full of defining moments and definitive results. No series of events has so intensely revealed the anger of sinners toward a holy God and the quenchless love of that God for angry sinners.

II. Triumphal Entry, the Temple Cleansed.

Aflame with envy, malice, and rage, as they saw the crowds of people adoringly gather about Jesus in the temple, the religious leaders commanded Jesus to silence the acclamations of the rag-tag mob. Jesus calmly replied, “I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (*Luke 19:40*). Entering Jerusalem, Jesus quietly surveyed the temple that more resembled a cattle yard and stock exchange than a house of worship. Unnoticed amid the hubbub, Jesus withdrew to Bethany.

But the next day, He returned to demonstrate with a rod of justice the purpose of the sanctuary, which the priests had corrupted in their pride and avarice (*see Isa. 56:4-8, Jer. 7:8-15, Matt. 21:12-16, Mark 11:11-19*). What a brutal irony that the very animals that symbolized Christ’s sacrifice were being sold by the priests for exorbitant profits! In their hunger for gain they smothered the glorious gospel lessons embodied in the sanctuary services. Grieved over the enormous spiritual loss thus inflicted, Jesus exerted His rightful authority to cleanse His Father’s temple of the unholy traffic that had turned His house of prayer into a den of thieves.

Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 589–600. Had the priests cherished the meaning of the temple services and the essence of true Judaism, what influence might they have borne for the spread of the gospel and what spiritual gifts might they have exercised! Apply this lesson to the church today (*1 Pet. 2:6-9*).

III. Jesus and the Jews.

Jesus’ teachings were so pure, clear, and logical that the common people heard Him gladly, at least until Christ began to progressively reveal more and more of the high cost of discipleship. This disclosure included not only the social ostracism and persecution the gospel would entail in a carnal world but also the call to self-denial and victory over sin. Those who live in a culturally Christian society should never forget the severe persecution to which Christians are now being subjected in many nations where Bible Christianity is the religion of the minority.

Jesus and the Jews

Immediately after putting the religious leaders in a bind (*Matt. 21:23-27*), Jesus told a few parables about the fate of those who would reject Him (*vss. 28-46*). Interestingly enough, in Matthew 21:45, the chief priests and Pharisees believed that Jesus had spoken about them; that is, the chief priests and the Pharisees themselves as opposed to a majority of the Jewish people, who, themselves, seemed supportive of Jesus.

Look up the following texts. What do they say was the attitude of most of the people about Jesus during His ministry? *Matt. 26:3-5; Mark 14:1, 2; Luke 22:2; Luke 23:27, 28; John 11:48.*

According to these texts, many of the people supported Jesus, which is why the chief priests and rabbis were so fearful of Him. If Jesus were just some inconsequential preacher who had no following, the leaders wouldn't have had the attitude they had, so powerfully expressed in John 11:48, in which they said that if they let Jesus alone, "all men will believe on him." Obviously, there were many Jews who believed in Jesus already, and unless Jesus were stopped, many more would become believers.

Scholars have noted gross irregularities in the trial of Jesus. First, it was held at night, which, according to traditional Jewish practice, should not have happened, especially in a case involving a capital offense. The fact is that the leaders had to hold the trial as they did in order to keep it from the people.

Of course, there was a rabble that promoted His death, but because this was during the Passover, when many Jews had come from other countries, it's likely that these had never heard of Jesus or seen what He was like or what He had done. In Matthew 21:10, 11, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, some people asked, Who is this? The crowd answered them that it was Jesus. How could those people have not known? Possibly they were Jews who—coming from abroad (and were thus unaware of Jesus)—followed their leaders and called for His death. Once the truth about Jesus was known, many Jews became followers (*Acts 2:41; 21:20, 21*).

Christ's whole life was a steadily unfolding benediction of divine love in constant action to meet people's deepest needs. No one can be neutral about such love with its legitimate claims to our loyalty and devotion. Those who pride themselves on their religiousness but are determined to avoid a consecrated practice of the truth will be furious over the manifestation of true religion. So it was with the Pharisees, as reflected in their speedy and brutal inquisition against Jesus. They were tired of having their spiritual destitution and dereliction exposed by the inexhaustible riches of Christ's goodness and truth, so freely distributed to every willing

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Luke 19:37-40; John 13:1, 15-17; 2 Corinthians 5:21.*

- 1 In our media-saturated world, some events receive a lot of attention. This puts pressure on those individuals at the center of the media coverage. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to call attention to His impending sacrifice? Why is it so critical to use our voices to announce the Cross and the hope that it offers to our neighbors?
- 2 We often show our love to significant people in our lives by giving them cards, candy, and flowers. How do the gifts we give to others compare with the way Jesus showed His love for humankind? What keeps you from allowing Jesus to wash your feet? (*See John 13:6-8.*)
- 3 Jesus' example of love and service was so shocking to the disciples that they, and we, have a hard time emulating it. Why did Jesus say we would be "blessed" (*John 13:17, NIV*) if we continued to celebrate the ordinance of foot washing? How can we make this tradition a value that affects all the relationships in our lives?
- 4 Gardens are usually bright, beautiful places. Why do artists paint Jesus' struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane in such somber tones? Why is it important for us to reflect on this event? In what ways have you allowed God's will to direct your life? Encourage your class to share with one another how this surrender has been a blessing.
- 5 John 15:16 records Jesus' desire that we will produce "fruit that will last" (*NIV*). Review your life. What things have you done that are of eternal significance? Make a list of people whom the Holy Spirit is inviting you to contact on behalf of the gospel.

Clean Feet

After a day’s interlude of quiet reflection with Jesus, the disciples made preparations for the Passover. Fully aware that He was the true Paschal Lamb who was to be sacrificed, Jesus wished to spend the few remaining peaceful hours with His disciples for their benefit. How moving are His words: “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer” (*Luke 22:15*).

Read John 13:1-17. What was one of Christ’s last acts before His atoning death? What was the significance of that act? What does it tell us about the character of God?

Just before the shame, the suffering, and the pain of the Cross, Jesus washes the feet of His own disciples! Here He is, God Himself, the One who made the worlds, washing the feet of His disciples? Only as we grasp who Jesus really is can we even begin to realize what an incredible act this was, what an incredible revelation of the character of our God. And, in its own indirect way, this act is a revelation about ourselves—we who, by nature, want to be served by others rather than to serve others. Christ’s act wasn’t a rebuke just to His disciples; it’s a rebuke to us every time we’re arrogant, proud, and selfish.

Besides giving His disciples a needed lesson in humility and servanthood, what theological lesson was Jesus teaching through the foot washing? *John 13:10.*

By saying that he or she who has been bathed doesn’t need another full bath but merely needs his or her feet cleansed, Jesus was talking about what might be called postbaptismal sin. That is, those who have been baptized (bathed) don’t need to be rebaptized after each sin. Foot washing itself can be a symbol of repentance, cleansing, and forgiveness.

Most people don’t find foot washing pleasant (*which is why many churches don’t practice it, despite Christ’s command in John 13:14, 15*). Yet, it wasn’t meant to be pleasant. Why not? What other unpleasant thing does God admonish us to do?

recipient, including prostitutes, lepers, and tax collectors. What a slap in the face of priestly piety! Christ embraced those whom these guardians of decency excommunicated and shunned.

IV. Clean Feet.

“The whole life of Christ had been a life of unselfish service. ‘Not to be ministered unto, but to minister’ (Matt. 20:28), had been the lesson of His every act. But not yet had the disciples learned the lesson.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 642. Jesus taught them this lesson not by way of reiterated doctrine but by an illustrative example so full of meaning and potent suggestiveness that He hallowed it as an ordinance for His church throughout time (*see John 13:1-17*). Happy is the church, the Christian, that practices this ordinance with understanding!

Witnessing

Knowing His time on earth was drawing to a close, Jesus made the supreme effort, once again, to instill in His disciples abiding love for one another and for those with whom they came in contact. With tears, He gently washed their dusty feet. Imagine the love that must have flowed from His hands—it must have felt like a soothing balm, so vibrant and powerful was the moment. Yet, they failed to fully grasp the meaning of the example He was setting for them.

Are we any different? Do we remember His example at times when arrogance and pride threaten to creep into our souls? Do those around us witness His kindness, His compassion, and His love at times such as that? Or are they exposed to glimpses of Satan’s cunning and sly maneuvering?

Suffering humanity moves the heart of the committed Christian to minister as Jesus did to those around us. If you ever have been present when someone (either friend or stranger) encountered an agonizing moment in time, you saw into the inner workings, the core, of his or her struggle *to understand, to accept, to grasp* at a way to *deal* with the issue. Perhaps it was suddenly learning about a life-threatening illness affecting his or her very existence, or maybe it was hearing the news that his or her job had been lost, or maybe a long-term relationship with another had just been severed. Whatever the issue, it caused intense suffering. Could you assure this person that, through Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, he or she would prevail over sin, as He did? Through your witness, was this person able to see beyond the immediate problem and glimpse salvation’s promise? If you were able to represent Jesus at such a time, how blessed you are; and, if you failed to take advantage of such a moment, resolve to never miss another one!

Gethsemane

Jesus entered Gethsemane with His three most intimate disciples and bade them pray and watch, lest they enter into temptation. What petition did He then plead before the Father three times? What did the cup signify? What paramount principle brought resolution to Christ's heart? *Matt. 26:36-44, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-44.*

Even as Christ was pleading for strength to save lost and guilty humanity, a maelstrom of treason and treachery against Him was gathering momentum. Satan strove with all his cunning to discourage Him, Judas was leading a band of religious mobsters to arrest the Savior, and the disciples slumbered.

Christ's heart was so deeply pierced with grief that He was already shedding His blood for the sins of humanity, even before the spikes of Golgotha bit into His flesh. He drank the gall of our guilt and shame that He might give us the nectar of His innocence and mercy. For us He drained the cup of wrath to offer in its place the cup of reconciliation.

What made Christ's suffering in Gethsemane almost unendurable? *2 Cor. 5:21 (see also Isa. 53:10, Zech. 13:7).*

"As the Son of God bowed in the attitude of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the agony of His spirit forced from His pores sweat like great drops of blood. It was here that the horror of great darkness surrounded Him. The sins of the world were upon Him. He was suffering in man's stead as a transgressor of His Father's law. Here was the scene of temptation. The divine light of God was receding from His vision, and He was passing into the hands of the powers of darkness. In His soul anguish He lay prostrate on the cold earth. He was realizing His Father's frown. He had taken the cup of suffering from the lips of guilty man, and proposed to drink it Himself, and in its place give to man the cup of blessing. The wrath that would have fallen upon man was now falling upon Christ. It was here that the mysterious cup trembled in His hand."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 203.

Why do you think that Jesus, who knew all along that He had to die this death (John 12:27), would, nevertheless, ask that the cup be taken from Him? What does this tell us about His human nature? What comfort can we draw from the fact that even the Lord Himself, in His humanity, had such battles?

Only when the spirit of jealousy, contention, and self-elevation is cleansed from our hearts will the mind be capable of receiving the soul-enriching truths of the gospel that qualify us to serve in the spirit of Jesus.

V. Gethsemane.

Christ's experience of measureless anguish in this garden of travail proves He was not living on a plane of exemption from human suffering. The thought of the awaiting cross filled Him with horror and dread; yet, for love's sake, knowing that His vicarious sacrifice was our only hope, He resolved to carry out the plan of merciful intervention for us. He and His Father had formed this plan long before the need for it arose. Infinite mercy and love were now coming face to face with unbridled malice and hatred in full display.

Christ's grief in Gethsemane was fathomless because the "cup" He drank there represented the collective guilt and woe and condemnation of a world full of sinners throughout its whole history, all gathered, compressed, and thrust upon His own innocent nature, as though He were the originator and perpetrator of all sin and its consequences. He endured the Father's wrath against sin in order to spare us from this just sentence of doom; for the wages of sin is death, and the sting of death is sin. Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 686–690.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: During this coming week, what is one event you are anticipating? (Teachers: This can be either a positive or negative event. Summarize the discussion with observations about the role of anticipation.)

Verses for Group Focus: *John 13:31-38.*

Thought Question:

How do you think Jesus was able to anticipate the events surrounding His death with the words of John 13:31? In what ways was Jesus' death a means whereby God is glorified? (Teachers: This question will provoke some discussion. Encourage your class to think of many ways in which the Cross glorifies God.)

Application Question:

What aspect of Peter's questions and supposed loyalty can you identify with (*vss. 36, 37*)? There are times when we love the Lord so fiercely and feel so close to Him that, like Peter, we think we would be able to die for Him. What advice does Romans 12:3 have for us regarding this?

Further Study: See also Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 685–694; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 200–205.

“Never before in His earthly life had Jesus permitted such a demonstration. He clearly foresaw the result. It would bring Him to the cross. But it was His purpose . . . to call attention to the sacrifice that was to crown His mission to a fallen world. While the people were assembling at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, He, the anti-typical Lamb, by a voluntary act set Himself apart as an oblation. It would be needful for His church in all succeeding ages to make His death for the sins of the world a subject of deep thought and study. Every fact connected with it should be verified beyond a doubt. It was necessary, then, that the eyes of all people should now be directed to Him; the events which preceded His great sacrifice must be such as to call attention to the sacrifice itself. After such a demonstration as that attending His entry into Jerusalem, all eyes would follow His rapid progress to the final scene.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 571.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Why do the Gospels focus so much on the last week of Christ’s life? Why is that so important for our understanding of the plan of salvation?
- 2** Read the quote from Ellen G. White taken from Thursday’s study. Write, in your own words, what she is saying. In class on Sabbath, let different people read what they wrote. What is her essential message, and why is that so crucial to all that we believe as Seventh-day Adventists? In what ways do these words catch the essence of the gospel?
- 3** If the disciples had imbibed more of Christ’s sacrificial spirit while He was with them, how would that have affected their ministry, their influence, and their capacity to appreciate His character and mission? What is the application for us today?