

Pre-Easter Daily Devotional Guide
“The Rough Road to the Resurrection”

This devotional guide is meant to be used each day from Friday, March 20 through Easter Sunday, April 12.

Read the listed scripture passage, then take a few minutes to meditate on what it teaches you.

Except for the first lesson, these all take place in the week from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday.

Use the short commentary and questions if they are helpful. Pray for God to reveal truth and understanding to you. If you fall behind, try doing one lesson in the morning and one in the evening until you catch up.

<p>(1) Friday the 20th Predicting Suffering Matthew 20:17-19</p>	<p>This was the third time Jesus directly predicted his suffering. How would you have felt knowing what kind of opposition and anguish lay ahead? What does it say about his love for us that he knew what was coming, but did not let it change his course? Is our love for others that strong? Is our love for God that strong? Pray that God will help your love and conviction grow to be like that of Jesus.</p>
<p>(2) Saturday the 21st Triumphal Entry Mark 11:1-10</p>	<p>Jesus approached Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He came as a peaceful deliverer, not a conquering warrior. The people celebrated him and sang his praises, but how many of them do you think were truly worshipping him as their Lord? Are we ever guilty of going through the motions of worship without really submitting ourselves to the Lordship of Christ? Let us raise the authenticity of our worship.</p>
<p>(3) Sunday the 22nd Lament over Jerusalem Luke 19:39-44</p>	<p>In this passage, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He had come to them as the Prince of Peace, but they rejected him. They did not recognize that God had come to them in the flesh. How often do we miss out on the peace of God that surpasses all understanding because we have closed our hearts to Jesus? As we live in self-imposed turmoil, I suspect Jesus weeps for us, as well. As the saying goes, “No Jesus, No Peace. Know Jesus, Know Peace.”</p>
<p>(4) Monday the 23rd Cleansing the Temple Matthew 21:12-14</p>	<p>This is one of the few occasions when Jesus displayed true righteous indignation! People were profiteering in the temple rather than leading others to commune with God. Jesus knew the temple needed a “house-cleaning.” At times, our lives need a house-cleaning, too. What are the things in your life that ought to be turned over and driven out so that God can be properly honored? Confess them to Jesus today.</p>
<p>(5) Tuesday the 24th Anointing at Bethany Matthew 26:6-13</p>	<p>The disciples were indignant that a woman would “waste” a jar of expensive perfume to anoint Jesus. They said the money should have been used to help the poor. Do you think that was the real reason for their indignation? Maybe they felt embarrassed or convicted that they were not more lavish in their love for Jesus. Extravagance can be a sin, but not when giving yourself to Jesus. How can we up our game?</p>
<p>(6) Wednesday the 25th Plot Against Jesus Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16</p>	<p>The religious leaders in Jerusalem were jealous and threatened by Jesus. Instead of acknowledging the darkness of their own hearts and accepting the work of God through His Son, they plotted how to get rid of Jesus. Enter Judas Iscariot. We can only speculate the motivation of Judas, but Luke tells us Satan entered him. He was willing to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Is there ever a bounty on our allegiance to Jesus?</p>
<p>(7) Thursday the 26th Preparation for Passover Luke 22:7-13</p>	<p>When the time for the Passover observance came, Jesus instructed his disciples to prepare for it. Jesus had already been doing just that. He had the room reserved, and probably some other details taken care of, as well. (Was the water jar the same one used to wash the disciples’ feet?) When something is important to us, we prepare for it. What can we do to help our time with Jesus and each other be more profitable?</p>
<p>(8) Friday the 27th Foot Washing John 13:1-7</p>	<p>This is one of the most powerful examples of humble service. The Lord himself, King of Heaven, washed the dirty feet of his disciples. It showed the “<i>full extent of his love.</i>” How do you think it made the disciples feel about their selfish pride and their petty arguments regarding greatness? Jesus told them to do as he had done. Beyond literal foot-washing, what are some good ways you can follow his example?</p>
<p>(9) Saturday the 28th The Lord’s Supper Matthew 26:20-29</p>	<p>Before Jesus took the bread and wine from the Passover table to institute what we call the Lord’s Supper, he challenged his disciples to look deep into their hearts. Only Judas would actually betray him that night, but they all needed to acknowledge their weakness. That acknowledgment helps each of us to grasp the importance of Christ’s sacrifice, and to appreciate the bread and cup that are an everlasting reminder to us.</p>

<p>(10) Sunday the 29th Judas Leaves to Betray John 13:21-30</p>	<p>The betrayal of Jesus was not something done in a moment of weakness, like Peter's denials. Judas had been planning it out. It was premeditated. How did he feel when Jesus revealed a knowledge of his plan? Was there a moment of doubt or regret? Did he have any second thoughts about betraying the loving Master who was sharing a sacred meal with him at the table? Unfortunately, his heart had hardened. Let's not let our hearts ever get so hard that we cannot be moved to repentance.</p>
<p>(11) Monday the 30th Prediction of Denials Matthew 26:31-35</p>	<p>When Jesus predicted Peter's denial, how do you think that made Peter feel? He adamantly denied that it could be true, but Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. Do we think we know ourselves better than God does? When the Bible tells us we are sinners in need of forgiveness, do we accept it? We should.</p>
<p>(12) Tuesday the 31st Prayer in the Garden Matthew 26:30-35</p>	<p>The time in the Garden of Gethsemane reveals the struggle within the soul of Jesus. Naturally, he did not <i>want</i> to suffer and die. But his commitment to fulfilling his mission of grace was even stronger than his aversion to suffering. Doing God's will was all that really mattered. May we have that kind of strength when facing the decision between what is easy and what is right.</p>
<p>(13) Wednesday, April 1st The Kiss and Arrest Matthew 26:47-56</p>	<p>Although the religious authorities knew who Jesus was, it was important to them that one of his own followers point him out. They may have felt it was a testimony to Jesus' guilt. Few dramatic acts are more heart-wrenching than Judas' betrayal. It was with a kiss, an act of love and friendship, that he betrayed the Son of God over to sinful men. It was hypocrisy personified. We need to identify it, so we can avoid it.</p>
<p>(14) Thursday the 2nd Sanhedrin Trial Matthew 26:57-68</p>	<p>The betrayal, arrest and trial were all contrived so that Jesus would be unjustly sentenced to death. Even the false witnesses against him couldn't present a decent case. But by this time it didn't matter. It's a strange thing that the Sanhedrin thought it could sit in judgment over the sinless Son of God. In reality it was themselves who were on trial. Whenever we oppose the work of God, we bring judgment upon ourselves. We should never <i>"exchange the truth of God for a lie"</i> (Romans 1:25).</p>
<p>(15) Friday the 3rd Peter's Denials Matthew 26:69-75</p>	<p>We must be careful about judging Peter too harshly for his denials. At least he had followed Jesus to the courtyard when the other disciples had run away. On most occasions he was brave and bold, but in the dark of the night when all seemed hopeless, his courage failed and he denied knowing Jesus three times. How do we sometimes – by our words, actions or inactions – deny that Jesus is our Lord? Has anyone ever walked away from you thinking surely you couldn't be a Christian?</p>
<p>(16) Saturday the 4th Death of Judas Matthew 27:3-10</p>	<p>Something happened in the heart of Judas when he saw that Jesus would be condemned to die. The scripture says he felt remorse and even confessed his sin to the chief priests and elders. He threw the blood-money into the temple and went out to kill himself. Unfortunately, regret and repentance are not the same thing. Repentance means not just that we feel bad for what we've done, but also we intend to change with God's help. True repentance should be a daily response for all of us.</p>
<p>(17) Monday the 6th Jesus Before Pilate Matthew 27:1-2 Matthew 27:11-26</p>	<p>Pilate was a Roman governor who found himself presiding over what he considered to be a Jewish theological dispute. He found no guilt in Jesus and seemed to want to release him, but the pressure from the religious leaders – and his instinct for self-preservation – was too strong. His question, <i>"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?"</i> is one every person must answer. What is your decision? Will he be your Lord? If your answer is no, there is no water that will wash away your guilt.</p>
<p>(18) Tuesday the 7th Jesus Mocked by Soldiers Matthew 27:27-31</p>	<p>In ignorance and downright cruelty, the Roman guards mocked and tortured Jesus before leading him to be crucified. Little did they know their behavior would be in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. (See Psalm 22:7 & Isaiah 50:6) Nor did they know the robe, crown of thorns, and staff they used to mock Jesus would prove how worthy he is of a heavenly robe, crown and scepter!</p>
<p>(19) Wednesday the 8th Simon Carries the Cross Matthew 27:32</p>	<p>A Roman prisoner going out to be executed often had to carry his own cross. But on this occasion, the soldiers conscripted a passerby to carry it for Jesus, possibly because Jesus was too weak from the abuse he had already endured. I wonder if Simon the Cyrene was angered or honored by the opportunity? Though he could carry the wooden cross, he could not carry the greater burden upon Jesus – the sins of the world. Jesus calls us to deny ourself, take up our cross daily, and follow him. What does that mean to you?</p>

<p>(20) The Crucifixion Matthew 27:33-44</p>	<p>There was nothing pretty about the crucifixion. Already suffering from blood loss and dehydration, Jesus was nailed to the cross through his hands and feet, hanging between two criminals. The Bible teaches us that <i>the wages of sin is death</i>. Ironically, on that day the world's only sinless person paid the wages of sin, while from the Gospel of Luke we learn that one of the men who deserved death was given life in paradise. We should identify with the guilty thief who threw himself upon the mercy of a merciful God.</p>
<p>(21) Thursday the 9th Words from the Cross (various)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."</i> (Luke 23:34) 2. <i>"Dear woman, here is your son."</i> <i>"Here is your mother."</i> (John 19:26-27) 3. <i>"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."</i> (Luke 23:43) 4. <i>"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"</i> (Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34) 5. <i>"I am thirsty."</i> (John 19:28) 6. <i>"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."</i> (Luke 23:46) 7. <i>"It is finished."</i> (John 19:30) <p>Which of these sayings express human suffering? Which express divine compassion for others? Which signal the completion of Christ's mission?</p>
<p>(22) Friday the 10th Jesus' Death Matthew 27:45-56</p>	<p>The death of Jesus at about 3:00 in the afternoon was accompanied by some dramatic signs and wonders. What might the darkness symbolize? How about the torn curtain of the temple and the earthquake? Why might God have raised the bodies of some righteous people from their graves? Perhaps it was a foreshadowing of the resurrection to come. The most important thing from this passage is that some of the Roman soldiers confessed Jesus Christ as the Son of God! We should do the same every day of our lives.</p>
<p>(23) Saturday the 11th The Burial & Guard Matthew 27:57-66</p>	<p>A disciple of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, was given permission to bury his body. John's gospel tells us he was accompanied by Nicodemus. Respectfully, they placed Jesus' body in a new tomb. How do you think they and the women were feeling? Roman guards were then assigned to guard the door so no one could break in and steal the body. But God didn't need any outside help to accomplish what came next, did He?</p>
<p>(24) Sunday the 12th The Resurrection Matthew 28:1-10</p>	<p>All four gospels give a little different perspective of the resurrection, but they are all in perfect agreement that the crucified Savior became the risen Lord! He appeared to those who were full of sorrow and filled them with inexpressible joy! In the same way, your experience with Jesus may be a little different than someone else's, but if you have accepted the living Christ as your Lord, you will share eternal life with all who follow him. "What death did to Jesus is nothing compared to what Jesus did to death!"</p>