

Passion or Holy Week

- Time from Palm Sunday through Easter (Resurrection) Sunday
- Included in this week are several important events in Jesus' life
- Week includes: Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, Spy Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday
- Why is it named Passion Week? Speaks of the passion that Jesus demonstrated as He willingly submitted to the horrors of the crucifixion to pay for the sins of mankind
- Described in all the gospel accounts: Matthew 21 – 27; Mark 11 – 15; Luke 19 – 23; and John 12 – 19
- Starting point of the week – Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday – Historical Context

- Context: Roman Emperors had consistently persecuted the early Christians
- Tiberius Caesar was the Emperor during this time as he reigned from 14 AD – 37 AD
- Rome had a local procurator named Pontius Pilate who governed the financial affairs and served as the imperial governor of the province of Judea
- Recorded in Matthew 20:17 – 19; Mark 10:32 – 34; Luke 18:31 - 34
- Setting: 12 disciples and Jesus on their way to Jerusalem
- Jesus told them of His impending condemnation to death by chief priests and scribes, His mocking, beating, and crucifixion AND His resurrection
- Note the disciples reaction – Luke 18:34
- If you had been a disciple of Jesus these three years and heard His preaching and teaching and observed His healings, what would you have thought?
- What would have been your reaction?
- What would have been your next step in light of the growing opposition to Him

Palm Sunday

- Recorded in Matthew 20:17 – 19; Mark 10:32 – 34; Luke 18:31 - 34

- Setting: 12 disciples and Jesus on way to Jerusalem
- Jesus told them of His impending condemnation to death by chief priests and scribes, His mocking, beating, and crucifixion AND His resurrection
- Note the disciples' reaction – Luke 18:34
- If you had been a disciple of Jesus these three years and heard His preaching and teaching and observed His healings, what would you have thought?
- What would have been your reaction?
- What would have been your next step in light of the growing opposition to Him?

Palm Sunday

- Physical Setting: Jerusalem with a normal population of about 50,000 swelled to around 150 – 200K for the Passover celebration; a riot could be possible among religious and political authorities as crowds gathered to see the Rabbi from Galilee
- Beginning early Sunday morning, Jesus and His disciples were walking from Jericho toward Jerusalem
- Then he sends two disciples on an errand (Matthew 21:1 – 9)
- ALL four gospels recount the Triumphal Entry, only Matthew mentioned a donkey along with the colt
- A simple explanation of what some call a contradiction is that when Jesus rode the colt, the mother donkey naturally went along. Perhaps He rode each animal part of the distance (Mt. 21:7)
- This was not the normal manner in which kings arrived, for they usually came as conquerors riding on horses. A colt was a symbol of peace

Possible Reactions to Palm Sunday

- Would they recognize that His Kingdom was not of this world as He had been teaching for over 3 years?
- Some would be laughing thinking that a simple carpenter would declare Himself to be King!
- Others would be angry seeing it as arrogant blasphemy against God!

- Many obviously hailed Him with joy welcoming Him as an earthly King who would reestablish throne of David and overthrow Rome.
- Jesus knew the cross awaited Him but Luke recounts He “set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 19:28)
- The crowds are growing; there is a festive air during Passover
- News has spread that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead – surely only the Messiah, the Son of God could do that!
- Thus, they reacted by cutting palm branches and spreading their coats shouting “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord” (Psalm 118:26)
- Jesus looks over the crowd and sees a mixture of people
- People who loved Him and been healed by Him
- Sadducees and Pharisees who were spiritual leaders and keepers of Law feeling threatened by His popularity
- Romans watching for any sign of rebellion against Rome
- Jesus knew that those crying “Hosanna” would soon be crying “crucify Him”

Jesus’ Reaction to the Crowd

- Luke 19:41 – 44
- Looking at the city and seeing the faces and masses of people, He realized the emptiness of their lives
- They had NOT heard the message of peace
- They did NOT understand the purpose of His coming!
- They had eyes but they didn’t see
- They had ears, but they didn’t hear
- They missed the whole point of the message God had given them in Jesus and the prophets earlier
- Their waving palm branches showed they looked for a conqueror not for a message that included “love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you” OR

- “If someone smites you on the cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone wants your coat, give him your shirt as well. If they command you to carry their pack a mile, go two.”

Jesus’ Reaction to the Crowd

- These were God’s chosen people
- He had loved them and lead them across the wilderness into the Promised Land
- BUT they didn’t understand when the Messiah came and walked among them!
- Matthew adds that Jesus would have gathered them together as a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings but they would not come [Mt. 23:37]
- Because of all this and more, JESUS WEPT!

Caution Concerning the Chronology of Events in Passion Week

- Why could these days be uncertain as to the chronology?
- Romans and Jews had different methods for calculating the starting of a day
- In fact there were different calendars used in Jesus’ day by various groups
- Some used the lunar calendar; others, the solar calendar
- So, while we celebrate these days according to our calendar and calculations, perhaps we can’t be too dogmatic
- However, these events leading up to Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday did occur and that is what we must emphasize

Holy Monday

- Celebrated by some denominations and Eastern Orthodox Church
- Day characterized by three events:
- 1 – cleansing the temple for the money changes; saying it should be a “house of prayer” rather than a “robbers den” (Mt. 21:12 – 13)

- 2 – healing of blind and lame; praised by the children shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David”; infuriated the chief priests and scribes and Jesus quotes Psalm 8:2 (Mt. 21:14 – 17)
- 3 – cursing of the fig tree (Mt. 21:18 – 22)

Closer Look at the Cursing of the Fig Tree (Mt. 21:18 – 22)

- Setting: Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem after staying in Bethany overnight; became hungry on the way (Mt. 21:17 – 18)
- Coming to the fig tree, he found it had no fruit on it; He cursed it and the tree immediately withered “from the roots up” (Mark 11:20)
- Understanding the fig tree helps us figure out the significance of this account
- Fruit of the tree generally appears before the leaves and since the fruit is green it blends in with the leaves until it is almost ripe
- So when disciples saw the tree at a distance with leaves, they would have assumed it would have fruit earlier in the season than expected
- Fig tree is often used symbolically to represent Israel

What was Jesus indicating by the Temple cleansing and Fig Tree Cursing?

- Fig tree often represented Israel in the Bible
- So, looking at both events (temple cleansing and fig tree cursing), what was Jesus saying?
- He was effectively indicating three things:
 - 1 – denouncing Israel’s worship of God (money changers made it a robbers’ den)
 - 2 – denouncing them as a nation (fig tree, symbol of Israel)
- But what could He be saying to us in this story?
- Denouncing “unfruitful” Christians – profess to be Christians but have no real evidence of a personal relationship with Christ
- Does this story challenge us to examine our hearts as we enter this Holy Week? Where are we on our spiritual journey or walk with the Lord?

Symbolism of the Fig Tree

- For Israel, it was a symbol of blessing and prosperity
- Absence of or death of a fig tree symbolized judgment and rejection
- So, what you are seeing is a people who are spiritually dead but outwardly religious with all their ceremonies and sacrifices
- Principle we need to apply here: professing to be religious, having grown up in a Christian home, regular attendance at a worship service are NO guarantees of salvation
- James, the half -brother of Jesus, echoed this same idea when he wrote “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26)
- We are to bear spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22 – 23)
- God judges fruitlessness and expects those of us who have a relationship with Him to “bear much fruit” (John 15:5 – 8)

Holy Tuesday

- Those who celebrate this day typically mark it with readings of particular Scriptural passage and singing relevant hymns
- On this day, Jesus was issued challenges by the Pharisees and Sadducees over subjects like marriage in heaven, paying taxes to Caesar, and the source of His authority (Mt. 21:23 – 23:39)
- All of these issues were set up to question Jesus’ authority and plot the reasons for His crucifixion as a blasphemer (Mt. 22:15)
- He even calls the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites as he pronounces eight woes against them (Mt. 23:23, 25, 27, 29)
- Jesus also shares a lot of parables trying to indicate what kind of kingdom He wanted to establish
- On this day, He commented about the widow’s donation (Mark 12, Luke 21); in the evening, He delivered His powerful message known as the Olivet Discourse from the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24 – 25)

Holy or Spy Wednesday

- Again celebrated by some with Scripture reading and hymns

- Day when Jesus was at the home of Simon the leper and a woman poured an expensive vial of perfume on Jesus' head as He reclined at the table
- Disciples were indignant that Jesus would allow this with so many poor, needy people
- Jesus' response: "for you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have me" (Mt. 26:11)
- Often called Spy Wednesday as Judas conspired with local authorities to betray Jesus (Mt. 26:14 – 16)

Maundy Thursday

- Day Jesus celebrated Passover with His disciples, Last Supper
- Two important events – focus of this day
- 1 – Jesus celebration of Passover instituted the Lord's Supper, Communion (Luke 22:19 – 20)
- 2 – Jesus washed the disciples' feet in an act of humility and service, giving us an example of our need for humble service and love of one another (John 13:3 – 17)
- Some churches observing a foot washing on this day
- Word *Maundy* comes from the Latin word for "command", referring to Jesus' command to His disciples to love and serve one another
- Foot washing reminds us of how we are to live the Christian life in humility (Philippians 2:1 – 11)

Good Friday

- Obviously this is the day we as believers call GOOD for the Lamb of God did for us what we could never have done for ourselves
- By going through the agony of the cross, He offered a way for us to accept His blood sacrifice to atone for our sins and establish a relationship with God the Father through His only begotten Son!
- Why is called good? Romans 5:8 gives us the reason!
- Through His flesh and blood sacrifice at the cross, He rendered powerless the one who had the power of death (the devil) and freed us from the fear of death and being subject to slavery in our sins all our lives! (Heb. 2:14 – 15)

- Jesus' sacrifice was offered once and is the final sacrifice for sins for all time (Heb. 10:11 – 12)

Holy Saturday

- Day between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday
- Celebrated as the day Jesus "rested" from His atoning work on the cross
- Remember from the cross Jesus cried out "It is finished" (John 19:28 – 30)
- After the crucifixion, Jesus was laid in a tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Jesus (John 19:38)
- Jewish custom dictated that deceased Jews have to be buried before sunset on Friday, because the Jewish Sabbath is from Friday night (at sundown) to Saturday night (at sundown) and no work (such as burying a dead body) can be done on the Sabbath!
- What happened to the disciples? They had scattered when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:50) and spent their first Holy Saturday hiding for fear of being arrested (John 20:19)

Holy Saturday

- This day would have been a time of grief and shock as Jesus' stunned disciples tried to understand Jesus' murder, Judas' betrayal, and the crushing of their hopes!
- Matthew 27:62 – 66 tells us that after sundown on the day of Preparation (Friday), the chief priests and Pharisees visited Pontius Pilate
- Such a visit occurred on the Sabbath, since the Jews considered a day starting at sundown
- Why the visit? They asked Pilate for a guard for Jesus' tomb for they remembered His say that He would rise again in three days (John 2:19 – 21)
- Many churches celebrate this day with a somber service in the evening with the message or thoughts centered on Jesus' suffering for our sake and observance of the Lord's Supper
- This day is **ABSOLUTELY** (along with His resurrection) the **MOST IMPORTANT** events in the Christian faith!!!

Sources: *The New Inductive Study Bible*. New American Standard Version. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers. 2005

www.gotquestions.org