

# **Youth Group Devotionals**

## **Week 4**

### ***Reflections on the Cross***

The purpose of this series of Lenten Devotions is to help us focus on the meaning of what Christ did for us on the Cross and to draw us into deeper reflection of our own lives. Each day we will be highlighting a different aspect of what Christ accomplished through the cross during his final hours. We will also be highlighting a different spiritual discipline each day that you can use to help you reflect on your growth in Christ and devotion to him. God bless.

## **The Response of Silence**

### **Mark 14:53-15:5**

It's funny that as I'm writing this devotional, I also happen to be watching the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. And even as I was reading the passage for today, I was watching it unfold on screen. A coincidence? Maybe. But even with the understanding that *The Passion of the Christ* is just one man's depiction of scripture and not scripture itself, I was struck by how accurately it portrays what was happening as Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin. If you have the chance, I'd watch the movie. Or better yet. Read the story the movie was based on.

### **Read Mark 14:53-15:5**

Try to picture what is going on as Jesus stands before the high priest. He's surrounded by an angry mob, and person after person comes forth to accuse him. He hasn't done anything wrong, and yet he doesn't speak in his own defense. His response to his accusers is silence. Why do you think that is? I think that when Jesus said "Not my will but yours be done" to the Father, he meant, I will take whatever abuse they heap on me. Jesus bore both the wrath of God on the cross, but also the shame of being accused, beaten, and crucified like a common criminal. His response to his accusers? Silence. Full acceptance that God's will was going to happen.

Spend sometime this day reflecting on Jesus and his response as he stood before the high priest. Yes, his silence spoke volumes about his character and his submission to the Father's plan. But the few words he spoke before the high priest speak immensely about his person. He is God. "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Death couldn't hold him in the grave. While the Sanhedrin accused him of threatening the temple, Jesus was only telling everyone that he was the perfect sacrifice.

Take some time to reflect on the Easter story and journal. What emotions spring up in you when you hear the story of the crucifixion? What thoughts has God put in your mind as you reflect on Him and all that He's done for us through his Son?

*"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." Isaiah 53:7*

## **The Response of Mockery**

### **Read Mark 15:16-32**

A number of people responded to the cross with open mockery. In the last moments of Jesus' life he received scorn from every sector around him. Let's take a moment and reflect on the types of scorn that Jesus received.

The Roman Soldiers and Jesus vs. 16-20. It's almost ironic to me that crouched within this scenario of the soldiers denigration of someone they presumed to be a religious/political Jewish upstart is the tragic reality that their brutality is directed at the only Son of God, and the true King.

Pilate Mocks Jesus vs. 26 The sign of his charge was written not just in Hebrew but in multiple languages so that any local or traveler could read the invectively sarcastic remark from Pilate that this is what Rome did with kings of other nations; whether or not he had washed his hands of Jesus' death.

The passersby mocked Jesus vs. 29-30. From the account in Mark's gospel Golgotha must have been packed that day because there are the soldiers, the other thieves, Jesus' friends and family, the chief religious leaders and also just people passing by. Whoever they were though, they must have been familiar with Jesus' teaching or overheard it from others because their scorn is directed at an argument about the temple. Ironically, they were looking at the very God whose presence the temple was built to demonstrate among the people.

The religious leaders mock Jesus vs. 31-32 I find it very odd that the religious leaders claim that Jesus had saved others. If indeed they knew he had saved others and that salvation is only found through God then they must've known he was God. Why then would they need to see to believe? The hardened heart looks but doesn't recognize.

The criminals mock Jesus vs. 32. Even those in the same situation as Jesus apparently were mocking him amidst their own suffering. If the shame of social rejection and humiliation of the bloody, naked, crucifixion were not enough he endured hours of ridicule from everyone around him before he died. What do we learn from this?

Today's Spiritual discipline is reflection. Take some time to remember the crucifixion of Christ and how you have responded in the past. What types of response have you made? What happens to the image of the cross when we sin and harden our hearts toward God?

*God, grant us humble hearts to look and see the sacrifice of Jesus, your Beloved Only Son, and help us to remember. Amen.*

## **Meditation: The Response of Indifference**

### **Read Mark 15:21-32**

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh! Sometimes, it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

You may not recognize the hymn above, but for the black church in America, this hymn was no ordinary hymn. Along with other famous songs such as “Amazing Grace”, these songs were reminders of faith despite being enslaved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The white slaveowners – many Christian – did not permit the slaves to worship in a way that they’re comfortable with, so the slaves held secret services where they could sing praise songs that incorporated African rhythms, cadences, etc. And from such squalid and unjust conditions came some of the deepest hymns that, despite their simplicity, still speak to us today.

The passage we read above sounds familiar. After all, we read it yesterday. But for most – if not all – of us, the crucifixion story is just another story. We read it, and maybe just think, “oh, how tragic,” and then maybe utter a prayer or two. On Good Friday, we hear the story, maybe shed a tear or two. But then, maybe two weeks after Holy Week, we’re no different. It’s almost as if we’ve never heard of the crucifixion story at all.

But such a lackadaisical indifference to the story of Christ’s death is not unique to just many Christians today – it’s happening across the world. Just this past week, Newt Gingrich, who is campaigning for the Republican nomination for the 2012 Presidential race, talked about how he fears that America is growing more and more atheist. But where does that atheism come from? Does it just appear from nowhere? Of course not. When people see Jesus’ crucifixion as just another historical event, coupled with the hypocrisy within the Church, the power of the Gospel becomes muddled. Elie Wiesel wrote once that “because of indifference, one dies before one actually dies.”

What, then, could be done? In a world that is all about getting things done quickly, expediently, in a world about becoming “bigger, faster, better, stronger” we need to slow down. When we think of “meditation”, we often think of Buddhist meditation, which involves trying to rid our minds of gobble-dy-gook. Those math equations, chemical formulas, all those things – just forget about them. But in Christian meditation, we’re more... realistic, shall we say? Instead of just clearing our minds of everything, let us refocus our minds on the cross. Let us focus on the image of our God who died for our sins. Let us focus our minds, our lives, on that image.

For tonight, let’s re-read Mark 15:21-32. I realize it’s a Wednesday, and it might not be the best day to do this, but if you have the time, re-read it a few times. Each time you read it, put yourselves in the shoes of the different people involved.

Picture yourself as one of “those who passed by”. How would you ridicule him? What a loony Jesus was! Destroying the temple and rebuilding it in 3 days? You’ve lost your mind! Might as well be crucified – the world is better off without you!

Picture yourself as one of “the chief priests and the teachers of the law”, the “evangelical conservatives” of Jesus’ time! This Jesus is delusional, liberal, Marxist! This is the Jesus who hung out with the tax collectors (think: liberal Christians), the Samaritans (think: illegal immigrants). This is the Jesus who even extended kindness to a Roman official (think: Arabs). Here is a Jesus who claimed that it is harder for the wealthy to go to Heaven! (think: socialist). Who needs a liberal, illegal, Arab, and socialist Jesus? Oh, and since he talked about “saving others”, let’s see if he can do that too!

Picture yourself as one of the Roman soldiers who crucified him. Who cares, right? He’s just one of those rag-tag Judeans, not one of us noble Romans. Those Judeans have no culture; they’re crass and uneducated compared to us glorious and refined Romans. Might as well crucify one more, right? One less Judean means one less crude barbarian on this planet.

Picture yourself as a slave in America singing the hymn above while remembering the cross. Your white masters whip you, yell derogatory comments at you, raping your heart and soul with every racist epithet, tearing down every shred of humanity you ever have. And then, after a day of enduring the scorn and evil heaped upon you, you sing the beautiful hymn of praise... were you there when they crucified my Lord?

And now, picture yourself as a teenage Asian-American man/woman getting ready to go to school tomorrow, probably staying up a little too late because of this long devotional. What is the cross to you?

## **The Response of Forgiveness Worship**

### **Read Luke 23: 26-43**

We've all heard the story before; this is the crucifixion of Jesus. It may take you back to younger days in Sunday School when the teacher would show a picture of a cross and all the little kids would ooh and ahh before asking for some more goldfish to snack on. We know the story, now how can we reflect on its meaning?

What does it mean for us to read about how Jesus was led to the hill to take on your sin? Maybe think of it through the eyes of a soldier or one of the other men being crucified as they watched him being beaten and mocked. How would it have looked through their eyes? Was it just another man being nailed to a cross or was it something that affected the lives of all those living and even not yet living through to this present day?

Reread the passage now through the eyes of whom you pick. Think of how it affected them and what it looked like as they watched it all unfold.

Think about worship- how you worship. When you are singing through words on a screen and when you are praying do you remember that you are praising the God who sent his son to take on the shame and sin of the entire world? Are those just words on a screen that you've come to memorize and recite like machines, or are they words that you are meditating on and consciously thinking of what you are saying? Think about how you pray, do you say the same things every time you talk with the Lord? Have those become words that you've grown so used to praying for that you don't even realize it?

Spend time in prayer reflecting on how you can worship in a way that truly gives God the glory he deserves. Meditate on each and every line that you are singing, pray in a way that it does not become a structured checklist of things to pray for, but think of it like a conversation with your closest friend where you aren't rushing to carry on with the rest of your day but you are there to spend time with them and to speak and listen while letting whatever comes to your mind and thoughts be lifted up to the God who is there listening. What little things can you do to make your "worship time" more of a lifestyle? What things are you doing during your day that aren't letting God speak to you without you realizing it, what can you change to fill your life and mind with that will benefit you and your walk with Christ each and everyday?

## **Matthew 27: 45-56**

### **The Response of Mourning – Confession**

Take some time to read this passage, and then reread it. Jesus could have chosen to take upon our sins all alone, he cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Through this experience, Jesus doesn’t choose to take a different route, but follows through with what God has planned for him, and dies for our sins. He chose to continue to obey God despite knowing how much pain and suffering he would have to endure. As we look at this passage, there are two mourners. One is God mourning the death of his son, symbolized by nature’s response.

The landscape reacts to God mourning, darkness passes over the land, and the earthquake shakes the ground. The curtain of the temple is torn, symbolizing a chetonet, which is something that people in ancient times would rip off from their clothes to mourn for someone who has passed away. And when Adam and Eve sinned, they were closed by God; they were wrapped in a chetonet, a veil separating them from God and each other. The chetonet being ripped into two shows how we can now be in community with God and that we are no longer separated from God. The mourning of God is shown through nature, and the significance of it is even noticed by the non-Christians, the centurion and the others watching of Jesus said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” Take some time to reflect on Christ’s sacrifice for us, and what it means for us.

The other mourners of Jesus were the women, specifically the Marys. The women were with Jesus through the whole crucifixion, and were there after it; they helped bury him, and were the mourners of Jesus on Earth.

Just as how Jesus was mourned for, take some time to reflect on how you have mourned for Christ’s sacrifice for us.

Now take some time to pray:

Dear God, we confess that we don’t always live for Jesus and don’t always show that we love him. We get distracted and stray away from you sometimes. We pray that you would continue to remind us of Christ’s sacrifice for us and that you would instill in us a desire to continue following you. Amen.