

Seven Days to Live – PALM SUNDAY

04-05-2020 Malone: Centenary UMC

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What if you knew you had only one week to live? What would you do with that time? Who would you see? What priorities would you have?

Passion Week—the last week of Jesus' life, before he faced a criminal's execution on a cross—was an extraordinary week. Jesus knew he was going to die in seven days. He knew it would be an excruciatingly painful death. But there's much we can learn from what Jesus taught and from how he acted in the week preceding Easter Sunday.

Saturday

The weekend before his death, Jesus stayed at the home of three of his closest friends in the small town of Bethany, about two miles outside Jerusalem. These people weren't among his 12 disciples; they were personal friends—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus chose to spend his last days of freedom with them.

Throughout Jesus' teaching ministry, he emphasizes the importance of **community**. Jesus continually told all who would listen, "You were created for community with God and others. You were created with a yearning to know and be known, to love and be loved, to serve and be served, to celebrate and be celebrated."

Have you found this kind of community in your life? It's more than good relationships with your family. You need an inner circle of friends who are fellow believers—just as Jesus had—with whom you can be honest, with whom you can "do life" together.

Sunday

On Palm Sunday—six days before Jesus' death—people lined the streets, waving palms as he entered Jerusalem. Think about it for a moment, it was the first-century equivalent of our ticker-tape parades for heroes down the streets of New York City.

Jesus' popularity was at an all-time high; his teaching had astonishing power. Jesus had changed people's hearts and healed them physically. He'd even recently brought someone back from the dead! By far, Jesus was one of the most popular people in the entire Middle East.

But everyone who lined the streets had a different reason for waving those palms. Some were political activists; they'd heard Jesus had supernatural power, and they wanted him to use it to free Israel from Roman rule. Others had loved ones who were sick or dying. They waved branches, hoping for physical healing.

Some were onlookers merely looking for something to do, while others were genuine followers who wished Jesus would establish himself as an earthly king. **Jesus was the only one in the parade who knew why he was going to Jerusalem—to die.** He had a **mission**, while everyone else had an agenda.

Things haven't really changed much in two thousand years, have they? People are still trying to push their agendas for what the power of God can do. What about you?

Monday

On this day, Jesus did something that shocked people. Known for his love, gentleness, and humility, Jesus came into the temple, saw all the tables set up for commercial business, and cleaned house. He overturned the merchants' displays and kicked them out of the temple. People had never seen this side of Jesus before.

Why did Jesus act with such passion? Because, he saw **worship** at the temple in Jerusalem going awry. Jesus knew he had to straighten out the situation before he died, was resurrected, and returned to heaven. The message of his transforming power was going to be left in the hands of worshiping communities. Jesus couldn't afford to have any church get distracted and caught up in questionable activities. They alone would possess the message that would change the world. **Jesus sent a signal: Don't get sidetracked. Stay on target. Stay on the mission of spreading God's love.**

Tuesday

Jesus **taught** from early morning till late at night. When the sun went down on Tuesday, his earthly teaching was done.

As dusk approached, Jesus taught the parable of the talents. In those final moments before his teaching ministry came to an end, he told his listeners, in essence, **"You have one life. That's it. Some of you have all kinds of gifts and abilities; some of you have less. But don't squander the one and only life God's given you; do something noble and great with it."** How poignant it is that as Jesus talked about this, he knew his life was almost over.

Jesus also spoke about the day of reckoning. Jesus referred to the day when all moral accounts will be settled. He taught that when that day comes, either people will pay for their evil by being separated from God forever, or they'll be rewarded for having accepted Jesus' payment on the cross for the evil they committed. It's either the self-payment plan or the Christ-payment plan—no other option. Jesus urged his listeners to follow *his* plan. Whose plan are you following?

Wednesday

Most scholars believe this was a day of **solitude** for Jesus. He was doing the most important thing he could—getting alone with God. As he quieted himself, he heard the still small whisper of his Father say, **"You're on a mission, and it's going to be difficult, but I'm asking you to endure. I'll be with you."**

Some would call it a wasted day. Others would say it was a day that gave Jesus strength to do what he needed to do.

We live in a culture that no longer values solitude. We go from one meeting to the next, one deadline to the next, one activity to the next. Too often we fail to quiet ourselves enough to hear what God would say to us—if only we were listening.

What if you took just one hour to go to a quiet place and say, **"God, if you have a message for me, I'm listening"**? Some of the richest times you'll know in life will be spent in solitude with God.

Thursday

This day, Jesus took a normal Passover meal and changed it forever. We remember this meal, this "communion" whenever we meet at the altar and partake in the sacrament of Holy Communion. But even before the disciples could be seated, Jesus taught a vital lesson in serving the needs of others.

You see, all the arrangements had been made for the Passover meal, but the servant who was responsible for washing the guest's feet had not shown up! The disciples came to dinner with dusty feet, and stood around asking who messed up the arrangements. It never dawned on them that maybe one of them could humble himself to do that for anybody else.

Then Jesus came, took off his robe, put a towel over his arm, filled a basin with water, knelt down and started washing the disciples' feet. They couldn't believe it! The Son of God, the Savior of the world—and he had the humility to wash their feet.

In today's words, here's the lesson: **True fulfillment never comes from a life of self-gratification.** The way to the top in God's economy is through serving. It's finding God's mission for your life and engaging in it. It's finding people you can humbly serve in daily, down-to-earth ways. And when you find God's purpose for your life and pursue it in a spirit of humility and **servanthood**, your heart spills over with love and gratefulness.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and when he was done, he said, **"Now, you go out and live this way."**

Friday

On Friday, Jesus voluntarily **submitted** to be nailed to a cross. The Bible says at noon the skies got dark. There was an earthquake. The temple veil was torn. People suddenly realized that when Jesus cried out, "**It is finished,**" and then died, **he was no ordinary man.** Jesus was taken from the cross, prepared for burial, and put in a borrowed tomb.

Saturday

Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. As David Phelps, my favorite contemporary gospel singer, would sing, "That was the end... of the beginning." But what follows next - is most difficult of all, because this day is the day **between** the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus had predicted he'd be crucified, and that he'd rise from the dead. Yet, on Saturday, He was dead and lying in a tomb. **Would he come back? Could He keep His promise?**

Sunday

Jesus burst forth from the tomb exactly as he'd predicted. The guards at the tomb saw him, went back to tell the officials, "**He's alive!**" and were paid to keep quiet about it.

I won't go any further into Sunday's story... because we're all going to meet here next week to celebrate the greatest miracle of all time.

What I do want is to leave you with a thought or two and then ask you the most important question you'll ever answer.

Jesus appeared to more than 500 people—cynics as well as believers—before he ascended into heaven. There was no question about whether or not Jesus was resurrected.

With his resurrection, Jesus **proved** he is the Son of God. By what He did during his last week alive, but most importantly, on Easter Sunday, your life—and your eternity—can be changed forever if you simply choose to believe, to make Jesus the savior of your heart and life, to pick up the cross and follow Him.

Oh yes, the question...

What are you doing with the one and only life God's given you?