
THE STORY OF HOLY WEEK

Weaving together the perspectives of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John



SMALL GROUP RESOURCE
PARTICIPANT GUIDE

NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH USA

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INTRODUCTION

There are nearly forty years between the death of Jesus and the writing of the first Gospel. History offers us little direct evidence about the events of this period, but it does suggest that the early Christians were engaged in one of the most basic of human activities: story-telling. These shared memories, passed along by word of mouth, included stories of Jesus' miracles and healings, His parables and teachings, and His death and resurrection.

The four Gospels tell, overall, the same story of Jesus, but from four different perspectives. These depictions reflect the past experiences and the particular circumstances of their authors' communities. The historical evidence suggests that Mark wrote for a community deeply affected by the failure of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome. Matthew wrote for a Jewish community in conflict with the Pharisaic Judaism that dominated Jewish life in the postwar period. Luke wrote for a predominately Gentile audience eager to demonstrate that Christian beliefs in no way conflicted with their ability to serve as a good citizen of the Empire. John wrote for both Jews and Gentiles towards the close of the first century AD. Jesus is the center of this Gospel and all aspects of His life become revealing in this account.

Despite these differences, all four Gospels contain the "passion narrative," the central story of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. That story is directly connected to the celebration of Holy Communion. The sacrament of Holy Communion cannot "live" without Jesus' story.

As we celebrate our 150th anniversary as an international church with the "What's Your Story?" campaign, it is important to better understand Jesus' story. This Small Group resource has been created to go deeper into the story of Holy Week as depicted in the four Gospels.

For your small group discussion, this tool has been broken up into four sessions that focus on the events of:

- The triumphal entry
- The last supper and betrayal
- The garden, arrest, and crucifixion
- The burial and resurrection

For each of these events, Bible readings have been provided that each participant should read ahead of time. Additionally, there are discussion points that highlight the key differences and similarities between the gospels; as well as contemplative questions about the specific events within that episode of the Holy Week story. Each member of the group should receive a copy of this participant guide.

A few tips for Small Group:

Ideally, small groups have 4-10 people and can meet in a coffee shop, home, church, or wherever is convenient and most comfortable for those involved.

In an effort to grow closer to each other in the process of learning more about Christ, it helps to have an ice breaker at the beginning of each session.

A suggested ice breaker for Small Group is the "3 J's". At the beginning of each gathering, everyone shares a Junk moment, a Joy moment, and a Jesus moment from the week.

**All Biblical references are from the New King James translation. Additional material and research taken from A 10-Day Holy Week Devotional by Marty Boller and Story Thru the Bible by Chris Tiegreen.*

THE STORY OF THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY



What's your story?

Before you can tell someone your profession of Christ in your life, you must understand Christ. Discuss why this understanding is important. Without His story, do you have one?

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 21: 1-11

Mark 11: 1-11

Luke 19: 28-44

John 12: 12-19

Discuss these key differences and similarities

Matthew refers back to the Old Testament, recalling verses in Isaiah (62:11) and Zechariah (9:9).

John leaves out the whole explanation of how they obtained the colt, but includes some references back to the raising of Lazarus.

Questions for reflection

1. *Jesus' entry into Jerusalem seems to be the catalyst that propelled Him to Good Friday. Even though Jesus knew what the end of the week would bring, He celebrated with those that would eventually accuse Him.*

How can I embrace the joy and triumph of Palm Sunday in the middle of my troubled week? I am tempted and tortured at times with the evil in this world, but how can I, like Jesus, look beyond the pain and suffering, embrace the joy and celebration that is mine in Christ?

2. How was Jesus' entry into Jerusalem like an act of war against the devil?

3. *The people in Jerusalem were living in oppression when Jesus came to them. They expected Him to give them what they thought they needed: freedom from the Romans.*

What do I think I need? How can I relate to the people at that time?

Jesus saves us from our own short sightedness of our perceived needs. Jesus saves us from ourselves.



THE STORY OF THE LAST SUPPER AND BETRAYAL



What's your story?

Recalling what you discussed in your last session, how do you understand Christ's story more? How does your story relate?

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 26: 14-30

Mark 14: 10-26

Luke 22: 1-38

John 13: 1-30

Discuss these key differences and similarities

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all omit the telling of Jesus washing His disciples feet.

At the end of Luke, Jesus makes a comment about buying swords and when His disciples show Him they have two, Jesus comments, "It is enough."

Questions for reflection

1. *In all the Gospels Jesus tells His disciples that they will betray and deny Him.*

How has betrayal and rejection affected me and my faith? Have I allowed rejection by family or friends to discourage me so deeply that I've given up the work God has called me to do? How can I be encouraged by Jesus' ability to keep going despite betrayal, so that rejection does not win the battle in my life?

2. *The Passover feast was about to take place in Jerusalem. The feast began with the sacrificing of a lamb and continued with wine and unleavened bread.*

How did this Passover compare with the first Passover when God used Moses to deliver the Israelites?

Read Exodus 11 and 12. How did the original Passover serve as a picture for what Christ was going to do? What is the significance of the sacrificing of a lamb?

3. How do we commemorate the Last Supper story today? Why do you think it's important to do so?



THE STORY OF **THE GARDEN, ARREST, AND CRUCIFIXION**



What's your story?

Recalling what you discussed in your last session, how do you understand Christ's story more? How does your story relate?

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 26:36 - 27:56
Mark 14:32 - 15:41
Luke 22:39 - 23:49
John 17:1 - 19:37

Discuss these key differences and similarities

In Luke's portrayal of Good Friday, he seems to take on a sensitive outlook. Only in this Gospel does Jesus receive strength from an angel and heal the ear of

the centurion in the garden. Only Luke talks about the people of the city following Jesus to Golgatha, weeping and lamenting. Only in this Gospel does Jesus say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do," and says to the criminal, "...today, you will be with Me in paradise."

In the Gospel of John, we see Jesus portrayed as one in authority. In the garden He prays to His Father, "Glorify Your Son... I have finished the work which You have given Me..." and addresses the crowd that comes to arrest Him. It is interesting to note that in this Gospel, Judas does not approach with a kiss. Jesus is protective of His disciples, telling the soldiers to let them go. Jesus' tone in answering Pontius Pilate is one of authority. He speaks of His kingdom and says to Pilate, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above." On the cross there is not as much mockery recorded in John, as in the other Gospels and Jesus addresses His mother.

Questions for reflection

1. Compare the views of John and Luke. How do they contrast with Matthew and Mark?

2. Consider the irony, that Jesus is being accused of false prophecy and blasphemy, just as His prophecy of Peter's denial was coming true.

How do I think Jesus responded to Peter later? How would He have responded to Judas later? Which one was forgiven? Why?

3. Aloneness and betrayal hits hard at the human heart. What impact can come in my life from realizing that I have a Savior who faced extreme aloneness and deep betrayal and yet still stood His ground for Kingdom purposes? What God-breathed resolve that I see operating in Jesus here, might be available to me when I have my moments of feeling alone and betrayed by others?

Contemplation: Jesus, Your aloneness on this evening strikes at my heart. After three years of Kingdom ministry, touching literally thousands and thousands of people for the purposes of God, not one of those recipients of grace is there for You on this night of rejection and betrayal. I personally want to say 'thank You' for Your amazing willingness to face that night of aloneness for my sake. May the world know the full cost You paid in being obedient to God's plan of redemption.

4. *He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Isaiah 53:3*

For those of us who have the advantage of knowing who Jesus is after the fact, it seems so impossible that the Son of God could be treated in this way. We read these passages and secretly say to ourselves, 'if we'd been there, things would have been different.' But we can't realize what living around Jesus was like, prior to His death and resurrection.

This stark awareness of how good people, people who should know better yet fail to respond, should be a real wake-up call to all of us. God's Messiah can be standing right before us and we, for one reason or another, can miss Him or reject Him completely. The very answer we've been asking God for is standing right in front of us, but because of circumstances that surround us, we are either unwilling or unable to 'see' it with our own eyes.

How have I allowed my environment to water-down my core belief and corresponding life actions as they relate to Jesus as Messiah? Am I rejecting or betraying Jesus in any way similar to the patterns I see here in the story of the Gospels? If so, how can I repent for those actions and realign myself, unashamedly, with Jesus, God's true Son?

5. How have I lost the deep mystery and amazement of what actually occurred at noon, Good Friday, 33 AD outside Jerusalem? In truth, everything changed throughout the universe at this unique moment. How can I bring the power of that moment into better application and appreciation in my day-to-day life? How can my celebration of this moment change the way I live today?

6. *Recall back to your reading of the Passover story in Exodus, chapters 11 and 12, and then read again John 19:25-27.*

What is symbolic about the reference to the hyssop branch?

7. *In Genesis 2:16-17, God tells Adam and Eve that if they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they will surely die. Now read the comparison of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21.*

When considering the events recorded in Scripture, from the original sin of Adam and Eve to today, what did their choice cost mankind, from that moment on? In what way did Jesus pay the price for their sin?



THE STORY OF THE BURIAL AND RESURRECTION



What's your story?

Recalling what you discussed in your last session, how do you understand Christ's story more? How does your story relate?

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 27:57 - 28:20

Mark 15:42 - 16:20

Luke 23:50 - 24:53

John 19:38 - 21:25

Discuss these key differences and similarities

All the Gospels tell of Jesus' burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Only Matthew talks about the chief priests and Pharisees asking Pilate for a guard

at the tomb and only Matthew mentions the bribing of the soldiers after Jesus' resurrection.

After the women find the tomb empty and speak to the angels, Jesus makes a few appearances. In the telling by Matthew, Jesus appears to the women shortly after they leave the tomb. In the Gospel of Luke, He meets two disciples on their way to Emmaus and in the Gospel of John, He appears at the tomb, to Mary, who thinks He is a gardener.

After Jesus' first appearances, the Gospels vary even more.

The Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus meeting His disciples on the mountain in Galilee and giving them the Great Commission.

The Gospel of Mark ends with Jesus rebuking His disciples for their unbelief and then giving them the Great Commission. Mark also mentions the ascension of Jesus and the work of His disciples.

After the detailed story of the Road to Emmaus, Luke tells us that Jesus appears to His disciples and shows them His wounds and then when they still don't believe, He eats some fish and honeycomb. Then Jesus opens their understanding of Scriptures and promises them "power from on high". The Gospel of Luke ends with the most detailed description of the ascension.

The Gospel of John contains the most lengthy description of the time after Jesus' resurrection. After He appears to Mary, Jesus appears to the disciples in a closed room and shows them His wounds. John also tells us that Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The story of Thomas' doubt follows. Jesus then appears to the disciples after they have spent the night fishing and eats with them. The Gospel of John ends with Jesus' conversation with Peter about feeding His lambs as well as a short discussion about John.

Questions for reflection

1. All the Gospels tell of Jesus' burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph's willingness to serve, risk and be there when no one else was is truly impressive. Like Joseph, what practical and immediate ways can I be of service to Jesus and the Kingdom of God? How can I become a servant to God's people, like Joseph was to Mary and the other women who truly needed his help in very practical ways?

Contemplation: Lord, I see how Joseph, while playing a very small part in Your larger redemption story, still performs a huge service to You and the Kingdom of God. May I be of the same good character and high integrity when life demands that I do the right thing, even when nearly everyone else turns and walks away.

2. In the Gospels, Jesus tells us with certainty that He has come to bring us life, and life to the fullest. In other places in Scripture, we find that any life lived outside of the magnificent presence of God is much less than full life, and in most cases, death, itself. Yet we humans so easily ignore these powerful words of promise and spend so much of our valuable time here on earth searching for life in cemeteries and looking for love in the wrong places!

No wonder the two angels seem a bit sarcastic when they find these close friends of Jesus turning over gravestones in the cemetery, looking for the Living Christ. Maybe if we'd just listen to God a bit more carefully and actually believe and act on what He says, we'd spend much less time in cemeteries and much more time in God's presence, where real life is found. Maybe we should re-evaluate ALL of what Jesus says and take it just a bit more seriously.

How am I like these friends of Jesus, wandering hopelessly and aimlessly in a cemetery looking for the Living One? Where have I allowed grief, worries or unbelief to cause me to forget the promises found in Jesus' words? How can I step out of life's cemeteries and begin looking for life in God's presence instead?

3. What does the story of the Road to Emmaus teach me about how well I understand Scripture on my own, apart from God opening my eyes? Why do I think the disciples had never realized that Christ must suffer and die, even though it was foretold in Scripture? Do you think it's common today for us, also to have blind spots in our application of Christ's teachings?

4. *At the end of this seemingly horrifying "week" in the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth is alive. Just as He said it would happen. He is risen. He is risen, indeed!*

Do I realize that before this turning point in God's plan, the story of Holy Week, I had no opportunity for eternal life? Understanding this, what does Christ's victory mean to me? What changes can happen in my life, because now, Jesus lives?


