

Nov 5-11

Week 45

This week we will encounter the most powerful transition in all of Scripture—indeed, the most powerful transitional moment in all of history—as we move from the humiliation to the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Watch for details, but don't try to work out an exact harmony among the accounts; the authors included or left out various elements for their own purposes. Continue to ask yourself, What does this story tell me about Jesus?

Next we will transition to scene 4, “Christ’s Church: God’s People Advance the Kingdom.” Having been delivered by their King, the church now moved the kingdom forward by proclaiming the good news about Jesus.

Day 1

Read Matthew 26:36-75; Mark 14:32-72; Luke 22:39-71; John 18:1-27

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 8

The crisis approaches a climax today as we read about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, the Sanhedrin taking him into custody and interrogating him, and Peter's denial. Gethsemane means "olive press"; carefully read the descriptions of Jesus' anguish in the garden. He felt the full force of the moment and the crushing weight of the sins of the whole world for all time, and chose the path of obedience all the way to the point of death on the cross. Notice also that his disciples abandoned him, leaving him to suffer alone.

Matthew says Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, while John notes that he was first taken to Annas. It is quite possible that Annas (a former high priest) and Caiaphas, as relatives, lived in different wings of the same elaborate home, built around a courtyard. Matthew telescopes the story to focus on Caiaphas, who was the ruling high priest at the moment. The turning point of the story is Jesus' agreeing that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Notice the reactions to Jesus' claim. Peter, on the other hand, denied identification with Jesus. See especially Luke's account of Jesus' response to Peter's denial.

We are called to stand with Jesus before a mocking world, "bearing his disgrace" (see Hebrews 13:13). Will you do that today?

Day 2

Read Matthew 27:1-31; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 9

In today's reading Jesus was handed over to Pilate and mocked by the military. Watch for parts of the story that are unique to each of the Gospel writers. For instance, Matthew includes Judas' fate, and Luke includes Jesus' appearance before King Herod. John shares more dialogue between Jesus and Pilate than the other Gospels.

It helps to understand some of the Roman political structure. The Romans ruled their provinces (think of a state in America today) through either professional Roman politicians or local kings, puppet rulers appointed by the Romans. Pilate served as the governor of Judea and Samaria, and Herod was the king over Galilee. They were to collect taxes, render judgments, and keep the peace (prevent riots and insurrection).

The Sanhedrin, on the other hand, was a religious and political body of Jewish rulers who served under Pilate. Yet the Sanhedrin could bypass Pilate and go directly to Caesar if they thought he was not ruling well. So politics was a delicate balancing act in Palestine. Notice the irony that the Sanhedrin, rebelling against God's Messiah and handing him over to be murdered, asked for the release of an insurrectionist and murderer. Jesus was beaten in preparation for crucifixion and mercilessly mocked by a cohort of soldiers (about six hundred men). Such a beating was brutal and sometimes resulted in death through loss of blood.

Thank Jesus for his courage and willingness to endure humiliation.

Day 3

Read Matthew 27:32-66; Mark 15:21-47; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:17-42;
Psalm 22

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 10

Crucifixion was a means of brutal execution designed to bring about prolonged torture and shame. As you read the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, watch for the fulfillment of Scripture. Take note of the various characters that surround the story: not only Jesus' disciples but also curious bystanders, the criminals crucified with him (one of whom came to a point of repentance, according to Luke), the chief priests, women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, and Roman soldiers.

In crucifixion no vital organs were damaged, and sometimes a person could linger for a few days. The legs of crucified criminals were broken to speed death, since the bodies needed to be taken down before the Sabbath started at sundown.

Jesus chose the moment of his death. The phenomena that surrounded Jesus' death also bore witness that this was no ordinary man. Carefully read Jesus' statements from the cross. Joseph of Arimathea took responsibility for Jesus' body, placing it in a new tomb.

As you read Psalm 22, note the prophecies fulfilled on the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Read verses 27-31 in light of Christ's lordship and the advance of the gospel in the world.

*Do you grasp the extent to which God went to provide for our salvation?
Worship Christ, who paid such a high price for us.*

Day 4**Read Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21****Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 11**

The crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead in AD 31 are the climactic events of the Gospels. In the crucifixion Jesus died to provide forgiveness of sins and to establish the new covenant. By the resurrection God showed that Jesus was really the Messiah (see Acts 2:36) and demonstrated his power over death. The event says much about the value God places on the physical creation: he will reclaim and transform our bodies rather than just disposing of them. The resurrection also foreshadows a believer's resurrection from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15). Watch for hints about the nature of Jesus' resurrection body.

Each Gospel writer told the story in his own way. The writers at points focused on certain elements for emphasis or dramatic effect. For instance, John focused on Mary alone at the tomb; Matthew and Mark each telescoped the story at the tomb, focusing on one angel rather than the two reported in Luke and John. Luke telescoped the events, leaving out any mention of trips to Galilee. The events surrounding the resurrection are difficult to harmonize because the Gospel writers focused on various aspects of the story for their own purposes. Yet together they gave a powerful witness to the fact that, against all expectations of the disciples, Jesus was raised from the dead, appeared to numerous people at various places and times, and commissioned them with his agenda for the world.

What does the resurrection mean for your salvation? Celebrate the resurrection today.

Scene 4**Christ's Church: God's People Advance the Kingdom**

After being empowered with Jesus' Spirit, the disciples share the good news of salvation in Christ. They meet together weekly in congregations to worship the risen Lord. At first they stay in Jerusalem, thinking the Gospel was only intended for the Jews. But soon they are soon scattered by persecution, and through some very direct and creative interventions by God, they finally catch the vision to reach out to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Especially through the apostle Paul's labor, the church becomes multiracial and international, truly a worldwide people. Paul and other apostles of Jesus write letters showing the meaning of his death and resurrection. In a sense, this scene continues to the present day, for all of Christian history can be summed up in the phrase, "God's people advance the kingdom."

Day 5**Read Acts 1-4; Psalm 110****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 1**

Today we transition to Act 3, scene 4. Notice that in the book of Acts, which Luke authored as a second volume to continue the story of his Gospel, the kingdom went forward in the hearts of people as they responded to the good news about Jesus. Watch for several themes that will stay with us throughout Acts. The apostles were witnesses to the historical events surrounding Jesus, which culminated in the resurrection and exaltation. They bore witness to the events as they preached the good news of salvation.

Acts could be titled “The Continuing Acts of Jesus by the Holy Spirit through the Church,” for now the role of the Spirit became key. At Pentecost the Spirit was poured out, cleansing from sin and filling the believers with power. As you read, notice the continued crises and conflict with the same Sanhedrin that crucified Jesus. But now the church rapidly expanded as God gave the believers boldness and miraculous works.

These events constituted the fulfillment of prophecy. Psalm 110:1 is the Old Testament verse most frequently quoted and alluded to in the New Testament. The earliest believers understood this passage to be a fulfilled prophecy of Jesus’ exaltation to his position as the Ruler of all things. His enemies will all be subjugated at the second coming of Christ. In the meantime sinners can become his brothers and sisters.

God’s Messiah now reigns as Lord. Is he the Lord of your life? Worship him today.

Day 6

Read Acts 5-8

Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 2

As you read Acts, watch for Luke's summaries, like the one we saw at the end of chapter 4 yesterday. Also watch for the following pattern. A series of crises, such as the incident with Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:1-11), emphasized the need for purity in the church. Crises were normally followed by God's working powerfully and the further expansion of the church. Such expansion, in turn, was often followed by a reaction, such as when the rulers reacted to the apostles' power and witness (see Acts 5:17-21,33-39).

Notice in Stephen's speech in Acts 7 that this godly man addressed the land and circumcision as foundational for the Jewish people. However, the balance of the speech focused a great deal on Moses and the parallels between his ministry and the ministry of Jesus. Stephen compared the religious leaders accusing him to the rebellious wanderers of the wilderness who rejected Moses.

The result of Stephen's martyrdom was further expansion. In Acts 8 we see expansion across racial barriers (with the Samaritans) and across geographical barriers as the Ethiopian (from the Cushite people) took the good news back to northern Africa.

How do you see the kingdom expanding through your life and church?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 45

The Gospel writers told of the sorrowful events of Jesus' passion with little embellishment. The agony in Gethsemane. The Judas kiss. The arrest and nighttime trial before religious authorities. The daytime trial before political authorities. The verdict. The crucifixion, death, and burial. Then came the glorious resurrection and ascension! The Psalms foretold it. And then Acts related how the risen Lord gave birth to his church through the power of the Spirit by the leadership of his apostles.

Prayer/Meditation

Jesus, you humbled yourself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. I praise God that this was not the end of the story. Your Father reversed the verdict; he raised you; he exalted you; he gave you the name that is above every name. I praise you for continuing to work through the lives of the apostles, advancing the kingdom through the spread of the good news and the building up of your church. Thank you for sending your Spirit to dwell within your people. Amen.
