

STUDY GUIDE

Monday, March 29- Friday, March 26

Monday, March 29. Read Matthew 26:57 – 27:10. All week the rulers tested Jesus. Each time, he refused to answer directly. Now the high priest asked, under oath, “Are you the Messiah?” Jesus (verse 64) boldly quoted Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1, words all Jews held were about the Messiah. Peter acted just as Jesus predicted, then wept desolately when he realized what he’d done. Jesus’ judges had passed sentence at least two days earlier (Matt. 26:4). Now, with closed minds, they scrounged for evidence to support their “verdict.” How can you keep your heart open to Jesus’ presence with you each day, so that, by his grace, you will always stand with Jesus and not reject him? Peter was quite brave. He drew a sword in the garden, and then doggedly went to the high priest’s house. But there (verses 69-74) his courage wilted. When you are asked directly about your faith in Jesus, what do you say? If your courage fails, can you accept Jesus’ mercy in heartfelt sorrow, or do you fall into despair?

Tuesday, March 30. Read John 18:12 – 19:16. John gives the most complete record of Jesus’ dialogue with the priestly leaders, and with Pilate. 18:15-16 probably tells us why—the gospel writer’s contacts allowed him to enter and hear the proceedings. Pilate, a canny politician, saw no evil or violence in Jesus. But his main job was to keep peace with the leaders in Jerusalem. How does Jesus and Pilate’s dialogue in 19:7-11 show the difference between external power and inner moral strength? How did Jesus nurture and build up the inner strength that sustained him in this dialogue? How are you facing life’s trials with God day by day, as a means to grow your inner moral strength? Pilate avoided a riot, kept local rulers happy, upheld Roman power—and all it took was crucifying one sinless peasant preacher. Rome was no doubt pleased with him. When you have to choose between pleasing a human power (even social or family pressure) and doing what’s right, what choices do you make?

Wednesday, March 31 - Read Mark 15:16-41. The gospels record seven “last words” of Jesus on the cross. Mark and Matthew say Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The words show how cut off from God he felt as he bore our sins alone on the cross. In Psalm 22, faith prevails in the end, so Jesus may also have been affirming faith in God’s triumph. Naming Simon of Cyrene’s sons probably means Simon and his sons were known to Christians years later, when Mark wrote this gospel. (See other likely mentions in Acts 13:1, Romans 16:13.) What do you think Simon, carrying Jesus’ cross, and the Roman centurion, supervising the execution, saw that changed their lives? In verses 29-32 and 36, we read some of the insults people threw at Jesus on the cross. Where was the flaw in “reasoning” that “If he’s really God, he’ll do something supernatural to save himself”? Are you ever tempted to confuse human standards of “success” with the mysterious working of God’s love and power?

Thursday, April 1 – Read Luke 23:26-49. Luke records three of Jesus’ last words from the cross. We hear him ask God to forgive those who crucified him. We see him promise paradise to the criminal as soon as he asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom. We hear him commit himself to God in the words of Psalm 31:5, a prayer many Hebrews learned as children. We often speak of the “thief” on the cross. More precisely, the words the Bible writers use mean “bandits,” “criminals,” or “violent offenders.” What do you think stirred inside this violent man to lead him to ask Jesus to remember him? What does Jesus’ response tell you about the Savior’s heart toward you? As Jesus’ death neared, Luke writes, “darkness came over the whole land.” One writer said it’s as if Heaven itself could not bear to look on the tragic scene.

Friday, April 2. Read John 19:19-37. John’s Gospel shows Jesus on the cross tenderly giving his mother to the care of his trusted follower. He says he thirsts, and John notes that a hyssop branch (a Passover symbol) carried the red vinegar drink. At the end, perhaps in the loud shout Mark recorded, Jesus said, with spiritual as well as physical meaning, “It is finished.” In verses 21 and 31, the religious leaders actually ask to brutally hurry people’s deaths so they can keep a worship day “pure.” Have routine or frustration ever blinded you to the real point of your service to God? How can you open your heart to make God’s steadfast love the source of all you do for God and others?