

Prayer

We can never fully understand all that You have been through for us, Lord Jesus, but we are humbled by the fact that You have died for our salvation. Teach us true humility and teach us to accept God's will, so that we might live a life that is an honest reflection of Your life. All praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Gifts of the Spirit

Pray that the leadership gifts from Ephesians 4; apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, might be understood and appropriately used by the church today.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the music you listen to and enjoy
- Pray for the world as it reacts to the elections in the USA
- Pray for the new President elect of the USA, Barak Obama

Meditation

Where have your feet travelled?
Have they walked across the world?
Or just the places where you work and live,
and perhaps a few holiday destinations?

Where are you going, what is your journey?
And do you walk for yourself, or with others?
The difference lies not just in your enjoyment,
but where you're heading; your ultimate destiny.

Walking by yourself may make for a soulless journey,
but a shared path is a journey halved,
and there is something deeply human
about walking and talking. Jesus did a lot of that.

So go with Him to Jerusalem, and walk the pathway.
For the burdens of life are heavy, and the deal is this;
new life for old sin; and He will get there first,
for we never bear His burden, He bears all for us.

Glory be! Salvation!
Now that is real friendship on the journey of life.

Bible Study - Matthew 20:17-19

¹⁷ As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them, ¹⁸ 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death, ¹⁹ and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.'

Review

Our studies in Matthew move unerringly towards the time when Jesus will enter Jerusalem, heading for His Passion and His death on the Cross. On the journey, there are more discussions with the disciples (20:20-28) and angry exchanges with the religious authorities (e.g. ch 23), but there is no doubt the Gospel is moving towards its climax, and this is the subject of our passage today. These verses are described formally as Jesus' third prediction of His Passion. It is easy to read the text quickly, but it has much to say to us, and the fact that this is the third time Jesus talks in this way should alert us to its importance. Its significance lies not just in the description of what will happen to Jesus at His death and His resurrection, but in the spiritual implications of this for the whole Gospel.

On the way to Jerusalem Traditionally, the road to Jerusalem was taken by pilgrims going to the city for the great Jewish festivals celebrated at the Temple. The festival they were attending was the Passover, celebrated to commemorate the exodus of Israel from Egypt (Ex 12). Pilgrimages were times of great joy and celebration for everyone and each year, there would be crowds on their way to Jerusalem crossing the country. The city of Jerusalem was part of a plateau on a high Judean mountain group, so the journey was an 'ascent', both physically and spiritually. Psalms 47 and 48 express the joy and optimism of this ascent, and the cry 'God has gone up with a shout' (Ps 47:5) conveys the sense of the presence of God amongst pilgrims as they travelled up to the Holy City for a festival.

Yet there is a general lack of joy in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem with the disciples. If we look through Matthew's Gospel, all the events connected with Jerusalem had been difficult experiences. Firstly, in the story of the wise men, the city was the seat of Herod who tricked the wise men and tried to kill Jesus (2:1-12). Secondly, in the temptations, Satan took Jesus to a pinnacle of the Jerusalem Temple (4:5) to tempt Him. Thirdly, Pharisees had been sent 'from Jerusalem' to test Jesus (Matt 15:1,2), an episode which ended with Jesus cursing those who hounded Him! Jerusalem was certainly a beloved city, but Matthew does not associate the city with much joy, largely because it was the place where Jesus was handed over to die.

This all adds a sense of fear to this part of Jesus' life. This was not what they would have expected for their first journey to Jerusalem for a major festival! Matthew makes a point of saying that He 'took the disciples aside, by themselves' (20:17). Whatever had happened between them in the past, Jesus trusted them to understand His unique mission. It was vital that they understand what was going on, because ultimately, they would be responsible for explaining His mission to the whole world.

Prophecy Previously, when Jesus had explained the path of the Cross to the disciples (16:21; 17:22), He had spoken in different ways about going to Jerusalem, being betrayed, being killed and being raised; but these elements only come together in the third prophecy. Here, Jesus is much clearer about what will happen to Him. He also mentioned the cruelty with which he would be treated (condemnation, mocking and scourging), and the fact that He would be handed over 'to the Gentiles' (i.e. the Roman authorities), and that crucifixion would be the manner of His death.

This had to be true, because the Jewish authorities could only operate by permission of their Roman overlords. They could condemn a man to death, but not execute the judgement; only the Romans could execute a death sentence, and they had one way of killing non-Romans, which was crucifixion. It may surprise you to know that this is the only place in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, where Jesus is recorded as prophesying the exact manner of His death, which was a profoundly brutal and tortuous manner of death. It was designed to be like this as a reminder to servile communities within the Roman Empire that they should obey the Roman law. Jesus bore a heavy burden.

All the death threats up to this point in time had come from the Pharisees and Jewish authorities (12:14), and all Jesus' dealings with Gentiles had been favourable (e.g. the

healing of the Centurion's servant 8:5ff). Now, in this prophecy, Jesus' death was laid at the door of Jews and Gentiles alike and the full effect of the rejection of Jesus by the whole world was foretold. Also, we can make a connection with the Old Testament concerning the manner of Jesus' death, for a death by hanging on a tree was considered as a curse (Deut. 21:23). Paul helps us understand this in Galatians (3:13), in which the curse of death that Jesus took upon himself becomes the blessing of salvation, so that those living after the resurrection might receive the Holy Spirit of God (Gal 3:14).

In conclusion For Jesus, it was necessary to walk this path, and His whole ministry pointed to what was to come. For Him it was the sovereign will of God His Father to require this of Him, and put into effect the plan of salvation for all humanity. For this, Jesus had to be humiliated, and was prepared to be humiliated. Each of us who read this text must realise that we are talking not about a story, but about what Jesus did for us. However hard the story, and however hard the path for Jesus, it was travelled with each of us in mind. We are faced with the facts of what happened and must respond to it, for in the end, we cannot avoid it. It was and is God's way.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What Jesus had to say to His disciples was uncomfortable. What has the Lord said to you which is difficult, and how have you dealt with it?
2. Is it realistic to think that those who killed Jesus represent all humanity? Or did they simply act on their own and in their own time?
3. Why do you think that Jesus had to die such a humiliating death?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The call of Jesus has been the most exciting thing that has happened to me, and I often want to be able to say to young people in particular, that yielding all to God's call can open up the way to the most exciting challenges imaginable; but at the cost of everything. I had a good life as a Christian before I decided to pack everything in and offer myself for Christ's work as a Minister of the Church, and I could not have imagined the amazing and complex journey which He has led me on. It has all come from being obedient to His call to walk with Him on what has sometimes been a tough, but exciting journey.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *You and I are called to follow our Lord whatever the consequences; and that is the call of discipleship. We do this, knowing that for Jesus the consequence was death, but this was His unique call against which we measure all our discipleship. Reflect on how you measure up to Jesus life and death.*
- *Fast and pray for all who struggle with the idea that they might accept the call to walk alongside Jesus and accept His pathway, even to death.*

Final Prayer

Merciful Lord, I long to be a better person for You, living a life that shows more faith, and trusting in Your death and resurrection. Make me content to exercise my faith in every circumstance of my life; where I am, and with whom I live and work. So, trusting You, may I know Your peace, AMEN