

LIVING THE WORD—Week 11 (Sun., April 5 – Sat., Apr. 11)

The God of the Mighty Acts: the Great Story of God's Relentless Love

Easter (Part 1)—The Son of God Gives His Life on the Cross

Mark 8:31-38; 10:32-45; Philippians 2:1-11; 1 John 4:7-16

Key Verse: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The story of God's relentless merciful love has finally reached its climax. We have come to the greatest of all the mighty acts of God—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is God's redemption of his fallen creation. It's the fulfillment of his promise to bless the world through Abraham's descendants. God's mighty hand is again delivering his people from slavery. The prophecy of a new covenant is coming to pass. We'll look at this event in two parts. This week we consider the cross. Next week, on Easter Sunday, we will look at the empty tomb.

Jesus' death on a Roman cross appeared to be a victory for his enemies; but it was, in fact, God's plan (Acts 2:23; 3:17-18; 13:27-29). The sacrificial death of Jesus was God's act, even though it was accomplished by sinful people. And the irony, of course, is that Jesus died even for the people who put him to death. The crucifixion is the single greatest demonstration of God's love in history. This, ultimately, is how we know that God truly abounds in merciful love (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:8-10).

Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins. But this is not a sacrifice we offer. Unlike Old Testament animal sacrifices, this is not something we do to seek God's forgiveness. Jesus himself is the sacrifice, the one who offers the sacrifice, and the priest who presents the sacrifice to God. The atonement of our sins is from beginning to end the work of Christ. He opens the way into the presence of God (Hebrews 10:19-22) and redemption is God's free gift (Romans 3:21-26).

If the cross is the demonstration of God's love, it also represents the life Jesus' followers are called to live. Those saved by the love of God must live a life of love (1 John 4:19-21). Those who believe in a savior who sacrificed himself for us must live a life of self-sacrifice rather than self-indulgence (Mark 10:42-45; Philippians 2:1-11).

Next Week: Easter—Part 2 (John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:4-10)

Memory Verse (for Weeks 9-12): John 3:16

On the Mountain ("*Love God*")—set aside 30 minutes this week for quiet time with God)

1. Find a time when you can sit alone and uninterrupted. Spend a few moments preparing your heart to meditate on your relationship with God.
2. Read Philippians 2:1-11. Meditate on the description of Christ in vv. 6-8. Let these words soak into your mind and heart. Think about what this means for what Jesus did for us.
3. Read vv. 1-5. Reflect on where in your life you may not be showing the mind of Christ.
4. Pray that the Spirit of Christ will help you be more like Christ in your daily life.
5. Thank Christ for what he did for you. Use vv. 9-11 to praise him.

In the Gathering (“*Love Each Other*”—discuss with your home church or small group)

1. Why do you think the cross became the universal symbol of the Christian faith?
2. Ephesians 2:8-9 says that salvation is God’s free gift. Why do you think so many religious people have trouble accepting that salvation is not based on something they do?
3. What does Philippians 2:1-11 suggest the mind of Christ would like in our church?
4. What do you think it means to “take up your cross” (Mark 8:34-38)?
5. Jesus was Lord, but did not try to rule over anyone while he was on earth. He exercised authority over demons and sickness, but not over sinners. And he told his disciples they should not exercise authority over others (Mark 10:42-45). Why do you think many Christians are concerned with political power and church authority?
6. Do you have anything to share from your time with God, your family, or in the world?
7. If there is time, discuss the “In the World” section below.
8. Pray using the Lord’s Prayer as a guide. Pray especially that the kingdom would come in our lives and in the world.

Around the Table (“*Love Your Family*”—sit at home and talk together as a family)

1. If you went to a parade and saw Jesus go by, what would you do? Compare that to Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into the city.
2. What do you think about when you think about the cross? (suffering, sin, mercy, etc.)
3. Can you think of someone you need to forgive like Jesus forgave those at the cross? Can you think of someone you need to ask to forgive you? (Maybe this needs to happen with someone sitting at the table.)

Into the World (“*Love the World*”—prayerfully consider God’s mission for us in his world)

1. Do you think people who don’t believe in Jesus understand the cross? Are there things Christians do that may make it hard for people to grasp the meaning of the cross?
2. What could we do that would help more people know the message of the cross?
3. Since we are called to self-sacrifice, what is something we could give up to help others?