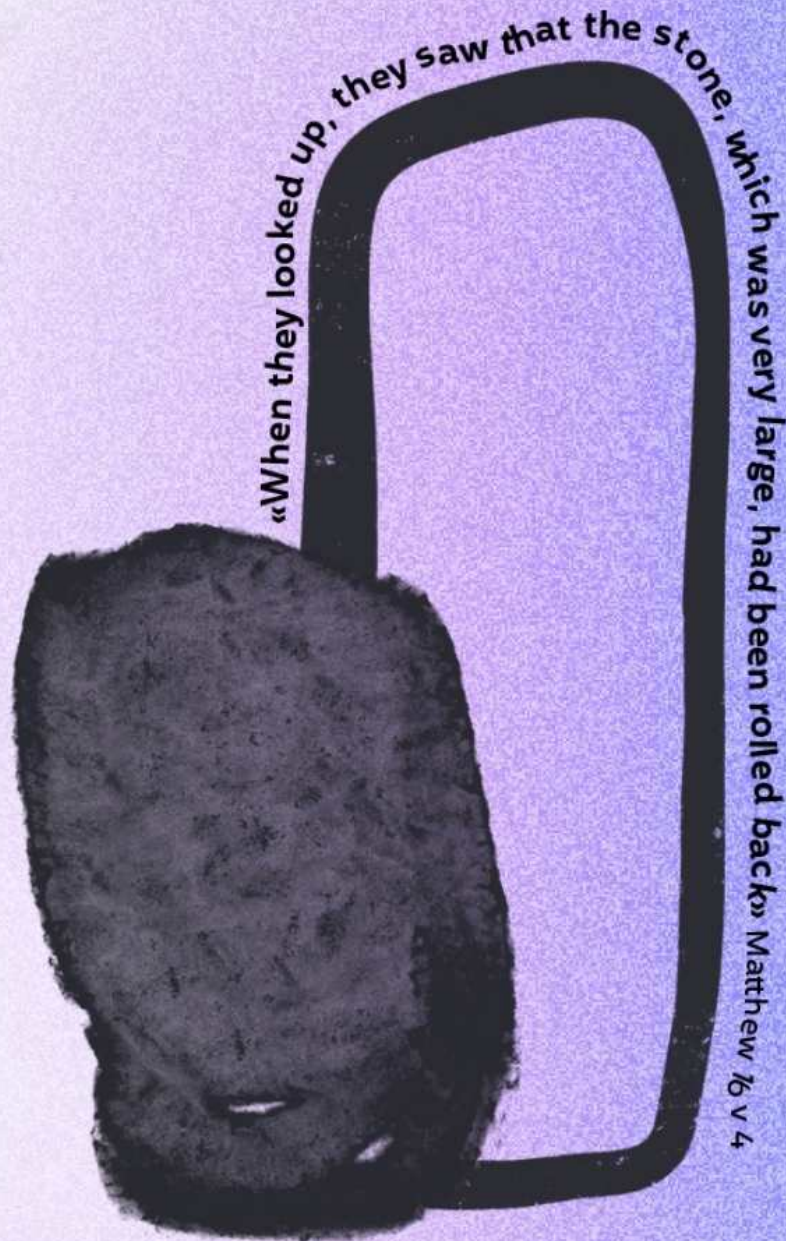


LOOK UP EASTER DEVOTIONAL WEEK ONE



«When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled back» Matthew 16 v 4



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WELCOME TO EASTER

Isn't it fantastic? However worldly, secular, ungodly our world has become, there is still this marker in the year that says everything stops because Jesus died for the sins of the world, and on the third day he rose again to bring new life. Everything stops because of Easter. And we need to celebrate.

Which makes Easter a fantastic opportunity to engage others in discussion about Jesus. What does Easter mean to you? Do you think Easter is still relevant? What do you think happened on the first Easter?

But it is also important that, as Christians, we celebrate this event for

what it means to us. As believers. As those living in the benefit of it. As those who have been saved.

We need to put a marker in the ground and say – THIS IS WORTH CELEBRATING. THIS DEMANDS A CELEBRATION. It is a much-overused word these days, but... THIS IS AWESOME. It is incredible.

So, the heart behind this devotional is to help us to realise the importance of Easter and respond to it. It can be a busy time as we try to squeeze 4 days work into 5. And we need to buy a mountain of food because the supermarket is going to be closed for just one day. And plan for what happens with the kids when they are off school for 2 weeks.

But we need to not miss the chance to celebrate. Not just in the human sense of having a party (although by all means do). But deep within us, to say, to cry out – THANK YOU LORD! You have done what nobody else – least of all me – could do. And you have made me alive.

Over the next two weeks, we are going

to explore the roots of Easter, and what it means. Will you pray this prayer with me?

Lord, help me to understand, to appreciate, to celebrate and respond to Easter. All you did then, and all you do now because of it. Lord, I give you permission to wow me, to cause my heart and mind to be amazed in wonder and thanksgiving.

In this devotional, we will be camping out in Hebrews 9 and 10. Each day, we will consider just one verse from these chapters. With the hope that day-by-day, our understanding and appreciation will grow, and our daily responses will build together to result in praise and glory to God.





SUNDAY 2ND APRIL

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. (Hebrews 9v24)

Do you remember those children's books that showed you 'behind the scenes' in cross-section diagrams? Sometimes they even had a 'lift the flap' so you could see inside a Norman castle, or a Viking boat, or perhaps see how a submarine works. On the outside, there is just metal. But lift the flap and you will see turbines, armaments, submariners.

The Sunday before Easter Sunday is typically marked as Palm Sunday,

recalling the events of John 12v12-16 when Jesus entered into Jerusalem on His journey to the cross. But today's verse from Hebrews 'lifts the flap' for us and shows us that cross-sectional view – Jesus was not just getting ready to enter Jerusalem but to enter heaven itself. He came from Heaven and would return to Heaven, but the path to get there would involve the cross.

It shows us that what Jesus was embarking on that first Easter was absolutely a physical reality. But it wasn't just a physical, earthly event. Something spiritual – heavenly – was happening. At Easter, we remember the physical events – *“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.”* (1Corinthians 15v3-5) But we remember them because of the way the world changed from that moment on. And the way our world changed when we made a personal response to God and put our confidence in what Jesus did – for us!

In the next few days, we shall consider some of the 'copies' this verse refers to, or 'shadows' as Hebrews elsewhere describes them (8v5, 10v1). And we shall see how Jesus came as the 'real deal' – not another shadow but substance. God's own and only Son. But behind the substance, there was also Spirit.

Many people are impacted by and numerous books have been written about the historical and logical evidence for the resurrection. And that definitely matters (read 1Cor15v14 if you don't realise that). But the amazing thing is not just that Jesus entered Jerusalem to die for us, but that it enables Him to appear for us – on our behalf – before God in Heaven. To say to God the judge – I'm representing her, she is forgiven. I'm standing in for him, there is no penalty for sin left to pay. You can bless them because they are righteous.

Because what Jesus did in 3 days on earth, has eternal consequences before God in heaven.

To respond...

In the coming days, we will unpack these things some more. But for now, let us thank God that Jesus always lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 7v25). That because of Easter, Jesus can represent us before the Father in Heaven.





MONDAY 3RD APRIL

Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. (Hebrews 9v1)

The Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. But they could equally be described as the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

A covenant is like a binding agreement. It often contains a purpose and points of agreement, the benefits to one another and the consequences of breaking the covenant. Perhaps the closest picture we have of this is marriage although, sadly, many view marriage as less permanent and binding than it is and should be. But in a marriage, two people come together

and make vows to one another – to stick together no matter what, to love each other, 'til death parts us.

And God makes a covenant in the Old Testament (actually, there are a number of covenants in the Old Testament such as with Noah and Abraham but the one that figures most prominently and about which the writer of Hebrews is speaking is the Mosaic covenant introduced in Exodus). God makes a covenant with His people. Indeed, it is because of the covenant that they are 'His people' and not just 'people'. This is incredible.

Can you imagine Bill Gates going into partnership with some bankrupt, failed businessman. Why would an incredibly successful billionaire do that? Or how about Liverpool Football Club proposing a 50:50 merger with Accrington Stanley. What would they have to gain from such an arrangement?

And yet – God Almighty, the Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe chooses to bind Himself to a ramshackle and wayward group of

wanderers in the Middle East. And declares a covenant.

And yet, even in the Old Testament, hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, God says I've got something better. There is a new, a different, a better covenant that I have. I want to make a promise to humanity that will make the old covenant seem like the whistling of the wind. So powerful, so life-changing.

If you thought the first covenant was incredible – you 'aint seen nothing yet. Wait and see what Easter does to the covenant.

To respond...

Let's thank God that He wants to join with us. To be in covenant with people including me! We are out of His league. We are punching above our weight. But He wants us all the same.





TUESDAY 4TH APRIL

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. (Hebrews 10v8)

Yesterday, we talked about God's covenant or binding agreement with His people in the Old Testament. Today's verse is intriguing – it recognises that, as part of that first covenant, God made a way for people to atone for their sin and acknowledge that He was their God, providing for them, blessing them. And yet – these were not what God desired.

In the book of Hebrews the writer builds

an argument for the awesomeness of what Jesus did by looking to the past. He was writing to a group of Jewish believers – ethnically and culturally Jewish but who had put their faith in Jesus. And who were coming under intense pressure to renounce their faith in Christ and return to the familiar patterns and ceremonies of Judaism. And so the writer shows them that what they have in Jesus is so much better. Why look at a picture of a place you want to go when you can actually go there?

Or, as the old advert for Galaxy chocolate bars used to say – why have cotton, when you can have silk? Or rather, why have a picture of silk? Why have the letters S I L K written on a piece of paper? The piece of paper isn't going to cover you, it won't keep you warm, it doesn't have any intrinsic value. That was what the relationship between the Old Covenant ways of engaging with God and those revealed by Jesus was like.

And yet it was God who instituted them.

Have you ever watched a movie with a 'big reveal'. One of those moments where you say 'I didn't see that coming'. And then, you watch the movie again and this time you see the clues, the pointers to the truth that proved so shocking when you watched the movie for the first time? And you think, well of course such-and-such was the murderer (or whatever the genre of movie you are watching).

These imperfect sacrifices and offerings are just pointers to the big reveal. Because God knows what is coming. So much more.

To respond...

Thank God that He knows what He is doing – in the world, and in your life. Take the opportunity to look back and recognise God at work. But not settle for where we have got to today. Because God has so much more.





WEDNESDAY 5TH APRIL

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (Hebrews 10v11)

Here is another verse which speaks about the old covenant and which provides a helpful foundation to our understanding of the significance of Jesus' death on the cross at Easter.

This verse says something about our need as people – to have our sins taken away. But it also tells us that the Old Testament system which the writer is addressing didn't meet that need. What we really needed – it didn't do. It helped people recognise sin. And

acknowledge it. But it couldn't get rid of it.

This is because sin is real. It is as real as having a large stone tied to your ankle. But sometimes less obvious. And therefore we need help to recognise it. That is what the Old Covenant law and regulations did. And we need a way to express to God that we are sorry. That we regret what we did. That we wish it wasn't the case. And the Old Testament sacrificial system, administered by priests, enabled people to do that. But it didn't take away the sin.

We used to have an old car which (along with a few other issues), had a problem with its oil tank. Every few hundred miles, we would need to top it up. With at least a litre of oil. If we went on a long journey, we'd fill it up before we left and, by the time we arrived at our destination, the oil warning light would come on again.

I knew I had a problem. I had a warning light in the car that reminded me of the problem. I had a way of responding to the problem. But none of that solved the problem. That was only solved

when I got a new car!

If you've been reading every day, you have probably caught on now that the Old Testament sacrificial system was not designed to be the finished article. It was not the final word on the problem of sin which fell woefully short. It was a pointer. A shadow. Of a greater priest, and a greater sacrifice. And to a way to be free of sin.

To respond...

Let's ask God to help us recognise our sin. But let us also be thankful that His heart is for us to be free. Thank Him that He makes a way for us to be free – we don't have to cover up or just live with our mistakes. And ask Him to forgive us.





THURSDAY 6TH APRIL

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. (Hebrews 10v1)

This verse ups the stakes. And reveals an even more profound goal than just having our sin removed. If you thought that was a big enough aim, today's verse raises it – perfection. We need to be perfect in the eyes of God. We need to be righteous in His sight. That means having lived according to his ways and His standards, and also being in a right relationship with Him – no barriers, no offence.

The verse also reiterates the point we have already covered – the Old Covenant arrangements are not the final word on what can be done about the problem of sin and imperfection. If they were, we are lost. Because they can't meet our need. They can't make us perfect.

The writer says they are a shadow. Have you ever watched a movie where – to create some suspense or sense of peril, you see the shadow first? The shadow announces that someone is coming. It appears from round the corner. And the music becomes dramatic, uncertain. And you aren't sure who is behind the shadow – is it friend or foe? Rescuer or attacker?

Shadows appear because there is substance. Imagine someone choosing to interact with a shadow of someone when the real person creating the shadow is stood right there. It's a ridiculous idea isn't it. But that is what the writer of Hebrews says these under-pressure believers would be doing if they reversed their commitment to Christ and went back to their old life.

Follow the shadow and you will find the substance. That's what they did when they found Christ. That is why we have spent a few days looking at the shadows we see in the Old Covenant. Because they lead us to the substance. They announce the arrival of Jesus, and just what He does in His death and resurrection. Shadows give you an outline but can only hint at the full 3-Dimensional full-colour reality to come.

I'm not sure the followers of God in the Old Testament could have appreciated that God's ultimate aim was to perfect His people. Not just to be able to cross out the mistakes but a clean, crisp new sheet of paper. Blemish free. What was not obvious in the shadow, is now revealed.

To respond...

Thank God that there is substance to His love, His activity, His intervention in our lives. He doesn't meet our needs with theories, or ideas – with substance. And with a person – Jesus. His vision for our life is so much greater than our own.

GOOD FRIDAY



He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, so obtaining eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9v12)

We have arrived at Good Friday. Such a significant day in the Christian calendar. When we mark the fact not just that Jesus was born, or that he ministered and modelled 'authority in action' that would be the pattern for His people for generations to come. But that He died. And more than that, He shed blood.

It was necessary for us that Jesus died to take the punishment for our sin. But it was also important that He shed

blood. We have seen that this was the pattern in the Old Testament – blood was shed (albeit from animals). Blood was sprinkled to seal the first covenant. Blood was applied during the exodus to protect the people from the destroyer.

The reason blood was so crucial in the Old Covenant, was because it would be critical in the New.

In the way that you are more than just 'flesh and blood', even blood is more than just blood. It is more than just biological. It carries more significance than can be seen under a microscope. Lev 17v14 tells us that the life (or soul) of a person is in the blood. There is a sense in which that blood speaks and declares (Gen 4v10).

In the book of Hebrews, the writer explains that sprinkled blood was crucial in sealing the Old Covenant, because it would be critical to the new one. (Heb 9v18-24). And that Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb12v24)

So we needed Jesus to die to take upon

Himself the penalty for our sin. But He also needed to shed blood which **DECLARES** that the price has been paid. Paying the price means we have been redeemed – we have been bought back / out of slavery to sin. *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” (Eph1v7)*

And that redemption is eternal – it doesn’t need to be repeated. The price has been paid, once and for all.

To respond...

Thank you Jesus because you paid the ransom for me to be free from sin by shedding your blood for me. Thank you that your blood speaks of my redemption. Thank you that I am no longer a slave to sin.





SATURDAY 8TH APRIL

...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9v28)

The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday (sometimes referred to as Holy Saturday) represents the in-between time. Jesus had taken upon Himself at the cross the sin of all humanity. For His followers it must have seemed like the end. For us who've read ahead in the book, we know it isn't. Because (spoiler alert), on Easter Sunday He would rise again. God would accept the sacrifice He had made. And He would demonstrate His victory over the power of sin. The

The authority of sin was broken.

But this verse reveals that Saturday is not the only in-between time. Even today, we are living in-between times. The time between what Jesus did that first Easter to break the power of sin, and the time to come when He will return again and finally bring to end the effect of sin on the world.

When he will provide our ultimate salvation. When our freedom from slavery to sin will be followed by freedom from the influence and effects of sin. When there will be no more sickness, or suffering. When He will receive all the glory.

He doesn't need to bear sin again – the price has been paid! And we are now living in a time when people have an opportunity to respond to that offer of forgiveness and freedom. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2Peter3v9)

Easter concluded one part of salvation

history but it also started a new one and better one. Which will be concluded and perfected when Jesus returns again. So what is our response. To help people respond to the offer of salvation. To wait for Him. And to actively look forward to Jesus coming again. When we shall join with Heaven in declaring: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns."

To respond...

Let's praise God that Jesus did not remain in the grave but rose again. But let us also thank Him that He will come again to demonstrate the victory over sin that has been won already. And let us pray that more and more people respond to the offer of salvation with faith.



