



Wycliffe

THE LAST WORDS OF JESUS



A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness
to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days
and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.*

— Matthew 4:1-2 (NLT)

Lent is a time of spiritual renewal and reflection that represents the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert before beginning his ministry. There is a multitude of traditions and customs associated with Lent, but many people give up a specific food or vice for 40 days as a way to practice humility and repentance before Easter.

Maybe Lent has always been a part of your Easter season, or maybe you've never observed the tradition. Whether or not you give up something for

Lent, you can still spend the 40 days before Easter preparing your heart and mind by reflecting on some of the things Jesus said in the key moments of his final hours on earth.

This devotional has six entries to represent each week of Lent. As you prepare to celebrate death's defeat and the hope of salvation this Easter, take the time to reflect on some of the final statements Jesus made and discover the powerful lessons he delivered with each word.

A black and white photograph of a wine glass and a piece of bread on a tablecloth. The wine glass is in the upper left, and the bread is in the lower right. The background is dark, and the tablecloth is light. A red brushstroke is at the top.

REFLECTION I

THE LAST SUPPER

Do this in remembrance of me.

— Luke 22:19b (NLT)

Jesus' final meal wasn't a particularly joyous one. The table was set, but there weren't any decorations. The menu wasn't elaborate. The disciples didn't chip in to buy the ultimate thank-you gift.

But the Last Supper wasn't uneventful either. Much to Peter's surprise, Jesus told the disciple that he would deny him three times that night (Luke 22:34). Jesus silenced the disciples when they started arguing about who would be the greatest among them (Luke 22:24). And in the ultimate dinner party diss, Judas left early to finalize his plans to betray the guest of honor (John 13:30).

One of the most notable events from the Last Supper is the tangible way Jesus gave the disciples, and us, to remember him. Communion allows us to prayerfully remember Jesus' sacrifice — that

his body was broken for us and that his blood was shed for us (Luke 22:19-20). As we participate, we can reflect on everything the Lord has done, knowing that we're following Jesus' instruction to "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19b, NLT).

The disciples might have hung on Jesus' every word because they realized that nothing would ever be the same again after that night. Or maybe they didn't recognize the gravity of the evening at all. Whether or not they understood in the moment, we know what happened and how important Jesus' sacrifice is to us.

We can hang on Jesus' words at the Last Supper and honor the Lord "until the Kingdom of God has come" (Luke 22:18b, NLT) by participating in communion and remembering his sacrifice.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- » If you knew you were going to have a last supper, what would you eat, who would you invite and what would you say to your guests?
- » Do you think the disciples experienced confusion at the Last Supper? What are some things they might not have understood?
- » Why is it important for Christians to participate in communion?



REFLECTION II

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

I want your will to be done, not mine.

— Luke 22:42b (NLT)

Where do you go when you're overwhelmed and need to talk honestly to God? Is there a particular room in your house or a place in nature where you feel like you can be close to your Creator?

After the Last Supper, Jesus retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. John's account tells us that this wasn't a one-off visit and that "Jesus had often gone there with his disciples" (John 18:2, NLT). Jesus' disciples accompanied him to the garden one final time, and Jesus gave them clear instructions to keep watch and pray. Then Jesus walked further into the garden to cry out to his Father.

He prayed: "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Luke 22:42, NLT).

Jesus' soul was overwhelmed, and he was in so much agony that his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). But through the pain, he continuously prayed: "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39, NLT).

Meanwhile his disciples kept getting distracted and falling asleep in the garden, even after Jesus woke them up multiple times to issue warnings

and to urge them to pray (Luke 22:46). But by the third time he woke up his disciples, Jesus was resolute. He knew that the time had come to face the path God had laid out before him.

When we face difficulties and suffering, we might be tempted to halt our prayers. Maybe you've even experienced times in your life when you felt like praying was futile. Jesus knew exactly what would happen to him, but he still begged and pleaded with God to take away suffering. This prayer is an important reminder of how connected Jesus was to his heavenly Father, even when he was wrestling with pain. His prayer in the garden shows us that even though Jesus was fully God, he was also fully human (Colossians 2:9; Philippians 2:6-8) and struggled with suffering just like we do.

The prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane is also a reminder of how important it is to keep our eyes fixed on God in times of deep struggle. Even though Jesus' circumstances didn't change as a result of his prayer, his heart became even more attuned to God's will.

Soon after, Jesus said to his disciples: "Up, let's be going. Look, my betrayer is here!" (Mark 14:42, NLT)

It was time for God's will to be done, just as Jesus had prayed.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- » Do you have a special place where you feel close to the Lord and go to pray? If so, what about this place makes you feel close to the Lord?
- » Jesus asked his disciples to go to the garden and pray with him. Who would you ask to enter into the garden of your own temptation and suffering?
- » How do you discern God's will in your life?



REFLECTION III

THE TRIAL

Jesus made no response to any of the charges.

— Matthew 27:14a (NLT)

People often use the adage: “Actions speak louder than words.” The intent, of course, is to remind us that even though our words are powerful, the way that we reflect those words, convictions and principles to the rest of the world matters.

In the hours after Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, he was betrayed, arrested, denied by Peter, presented to the high council and sent to trial. The trial began with Jesus standing in front of Pilate, the Roman governor. “‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ the governor asked him. Jesus replied, ‘You have said it’” (Matthew 27:11b, NLT). But after that, Jesus remained silent.

He didn’t say a word.

He didn’t say a word when the priests and elders made their accusations (Matthew 27:12). He didn’t say a word when Herod and his soldiers mocked and ridiculed him (Luke 23:11). He didn’t even say a word when Pilate demanded a response to the charges (Matthew 27:13).

Ecclesiastes 3:7b tells us that there is “a time to be quiet and a time to speak” (NLT). In the ultimate example of actions speaking louder than words, Jesus is a quiet presence in the midst of the roar of anger, frustration and hate that is being spewed around him.

His silence was prophesied in Isaiah 53:7: “He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word” (NLT). There was a lot Jesus could have said, especially in front of a large crowd. He could have delivered a sermon that led many to believe in him. Or he could have condemned his accusers. But Jesus knew that they wouldn’t listen and proved that silence can be an even more powerful testimony than words.

Rather than defend himself, Jesus stood silent, ready to be condemned in order to complete his mission to atone for our sins.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- » Can you think of a time when you argued when you should have remained silent? What made it a poor choice?
- » Why do you think Jesus chose to remain silent? What would your reaction be if you were in the crowd that day?
- » What question or questions would you have wanted to ask Jesus at the trial?



REFLECTION IV

THE CRIMINAL

I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.

— Luke 23:43 (NLT)

Pilate found Jesus innocent at the trial (Luke 23:14), but the crowd protested. So Pilate gave them a choice: he would release either Jesus or Barabbas, a murderer and insurrectionist. The crowd chanted for Jesus' crucifixion, and Barabbas walked away free (Luke 23:23-35). But Barabbas wasn't the only criminal impacted by Jesus that day throughout his final hours on earth.

Jesus was nailed to a cross between two criminals. As he hung, one of the criminals joined the soldiers and crowd in mocking Jesus. He said, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself — and us, too, while you're at it" (Luke 23:39, NLT).

But the second criminal recognized that something significant was happening. He knew that Jesus

didn't deserve to be hanging on a cross next to him. He said, "We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong" (Luke 23:41, NLT).

In his final moments, the second criminal made a plea to Jesus and begged him for mercy and forgiveness. And in the midst of his own turmoil and agony, Jesus comforted the man and said, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43, NLT).

Just like the criminal on the cross, it's never too late for you to cry out to Jesus. His story demonstrates that no matter what you've done or how badly you feel like you've messed up, you're still worthy of God's love. You too can join Jesus in paradise.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- » Have you ever joined in with what the majority was doing or caved to peer pressure and regretted it later? What happened?
- » What did the second criminal have to believe about Jesus that would cause him to ask Jesus for mercy?
- » What do you think witnesses might have learned from the interaction they saw between Jesus and the second criminal on the cross?