

Readings for Holy Week – Isaiah chapter 52 verse 13 to chapter 53, verse 12:-

This week's study is broken up into daily readings so that it can be used if you wish as portions to be meditated on each day during the week. The story is so familiar to most of us that we can miss the deep significance of the Lord's suffering and sacrifice. It is worth spending time each day thinking through what was happening and what it meant for the salvation of mankind. Good Friday and Easter Readings to follow.

Palm Sunday – Matthew Chapter 21, verses 1 – 11:- In this Gospel the disciples bring both an ass and a colt to Jesus. The writer could have been taking the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9, verse 9 literally! However, having worked with animals most of my life, I take the words of Mark's Gospel as an explanation of what was happening. See Mark, chapter 11, verse 2. The colt had never been ridden on before and was therefore "unbroken". The easiest way of handling the colt was to lead the mother ass, the young one would follow without any difficulty. The Lord Jesus Christ, the One through whom all things were created and exist (Colossians chapter 1, verse 16) would have full control over this his creature. The most important verse in today's reading is the question "*who is this?*" in Matthew chapter 21, verse 10. The crowds were right in what they said "*This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee*". Our answer must go further. This is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, come to suffer and die for his people that they may be freed from their sins and have New Life in him for eternity.

Monday – Matthew Chapter 21, verses 12 – 15:- The 'Cleansing of the Temple' is a familiar passage for most of us. Here in the Gospel of Matthew it can be seen as necessary for the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ to be exercised without hindrance. In verse 14 we read that "*the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.*" Remember that at the time, the very fact of being blind was seen as a result of personal sin – see John chapter 9, verses 1 – 3. In the healing of the blind and the lame the Lord Jesus could be regarded as forgiving their sins - compare with Mark chapter 2, verses 5 – 12. The Temple was cleansed in order that the sinners, including the blind and the lame had open access to God, seen here in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God himself. In contrast to the wonderful work of the Lord Jesus, the chief priests and scribes criticise his work. These are the same leaders who were described as "*blind guides*" in Matthew chapter 15, verse 14 and chapter 23, verse 16.

Tuesday – Isaiah chapter 52, verses 13 – 15:- These verses introduce the theme of the Lord Jesus Christ's amazing victory through humiliation. Here in verse 13 is the affirmation that whatever seems to be happening or going wrong is part of the outworking of salvation and his (and our) ultimate victory! The words for "*raised and lifted up*" are those used in Isaiah chapter 6, verse 1 of the Lord God sitting upon his throne. In verse 14 the prophet seems to begin by speaking directly to the divine Messiah; "*As many were appalled at you*". (the alternative reading is correct). His face and form were disfigured by the torture he suffered. Through him nations will be spiritually cleansed (sprinkled) and kings will have nothing to say by way of self-justification when they understand the implications of the Gospel.

Wednesday – Isaiah chapter 53, verses 1 – 3:- The word "*message*" in verse 1 refers to the prophetic message revealed in these verses. "*The arm of the Lord*" is used in reference to the mighty deliverance wrought on occasion by the Lord God, especially as revealed in the Exodus. Here in the Suffering Messiah we see the deliverance of the People of God by Christ's suffering and death. Notice how the prophet identifies himself with his countrymen using "*we*" and "*our*" in these and the following verses. Again compare this to the identification of the prophet with his fellow countrymen in chapter 6, verse 5. Do we avoid facing the real Christ? Is the depth of his suffering too 'real' for us? Maybe we prefer 'the historical Jesus'.

Maundy Thursday – Isaiah chapter 53, verses 4 – 6:- Today we can sometimes concentrate too much on the events in the Upper Room – the Foot Washing and the Last Supper. To me it seems that the hardest part of the battle, fought by the Lord Jesus Christ for our redemption, took place in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there that the Lord Jesus faced up to what was to happen to him – the agony of separation from the Father. It was in the Garden that he was "*crushed for our transgressions*". Read Luke chapter 22, verses 39 – 44. This was the moment of crisis. When he rose from his knees, the way to the Cross, suffering and death was inevitable. "*The punishment that brought us peace was upon him*". Here in the Garden our Lord and Saviour accepted the burden of bearing "*our sins in his body, up to and onto the tree*" (1 Peter chapter 2, verse 24 – literal translation).

*Go to dark Gethsemane, you that feel the tempter's power;
Your Redeemer's conflict see; Watch with him one bitter hour.
Turn not from his griefs away; Learn from him to watch and pray.*

James Montgomery 1820