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Suffering & Glory



MEDITATIONS
FOR
HOLY WEEK
& EASTER



The Eastertide season has been celebrated by Christians across history in every tribe, nation, and tongue. I am thankful for this collection of essays celebrating the diverse voices that make up a symphony of Easter reflections from the church.

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One of the greatest temptations of the religiously minded is to “spiritualize” the whole life, disconnecting the true from the real. This slips us into a bloodless faith that is more akin to Plato’s Forms than the gritty realism of the Bible. In this compilation of meditations from *Christianity Today*, we see a delightful blend of the personal and the philosophical, the old and the new, all pointing to the world-altering truth of Easter, disrupting the comforts of a world where Jesus remained in the grave. From calls to live out the implications of the Resurrection in our daily lives to reminders of the implausibility of the skeptics’ favorite tropes, this collection makes for a wonderful resource for the believer’s Easter contemplations.

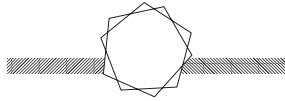
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Introduction

Leland Ryken

We are so accustomed to the Christian year with its benchmarks that it is easy to overlook how significant this Christian institution is. The annual calendar of such events as Holy Week and Easter and Christmas ensures that these events will receive full attention in the life of the church and individuals. There is something systematic about the arrangement, as all of the important events in the life of Christ are covered, along with such enriching additions as Thanksgiving and New Year. Because these annual commemorations are fixed in the life of the church and the broader culture, a wonderful communal dimension emerges as well.

The fact that these Christian landmarks evolved in the history of Christendom instead of being directly commanded in the Bible in no way detracts from the honor that we should accord them. A benediction has fallen on the annual cycle of commemorations that make up the Christian year. It is one of God's greatest blessings to us.

Of course, we need to do our part for the blessing to be complete. As individuals, we need to actively avail ourselves of the aids to devotion that are available to us. That is where *Suffering & Glory* plays its part. It is an aid to our devotion.

Suffering & Glory is a carefully orchestrated program of daily devotional readings for Holy Week and weekly readings from Easter to Pentecost. Perhaps the most obvious virtue of the book is its comprehensiveness. It offers something for everyone, as three ingredients converge.

First, as we expect in a devotional book, the chapters provide an exposition of the relevant Bible passages surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. As we traverse the book's chapters, we are taken close to the events narrated in the Bible, accompanied by the interpretive insights of the respective authors.

Second, the exposition of Scripture is complemented by theological reflection on the atonement, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Here the emphasis is not on re-creating the events recorded in the Bible but rather on interpreting the theological meaning of those events.

Finally, and building on the foregoing elements closely tied to the events in the life of Christ, there is an abundance of personal spiritual reflection in the chapters as the authors reach into their own lives for our edification. The note of authentic human experience permeates the book, and we end the chapters feeling that we have gotten to know the authors as our spiritual companions.

To make sure that this book is not only a contribution to our knowledge but is also of practical usefulness and devotional effect, each chapter ends with Scripture passages, questions to aid in our reflection, and a prompt to help you enter into prayer.

While the immediate use of this book is for personal devotional meditation, the book can also function as a resource for more public uses. There is an abundance of material here for a teacher standing in front of a Sunday school class, a Bible study leader of a small group, or a minister preaching to a congregation.

PALM SUNDAY



The Palms, The Temple, and the Nations

Esau McCaulley

The black Baptists of the South are not known for their adherence to a liturgical calendar, but we do know Palm Sunday and Easter. Palm Sunday is the tremor before the earthquake of our resurrection celebration, the birth pangs. Palm Sunday, then, is not the time for the best songs, suits, or dresses. The palms and shouts of hosanna are a preparation for something greater, the acclamation that Christ is risen.

But as the Palm Sundays have stacked one upon the other, more questions linger. What did Jesus want to teach us when he entered Jerusalem astride a donkey

to the shouts of hosanna? Did he do it so that we would have a nice liturgical action of palm-waving to entertain the kids on the verge of Eastertide?

Immediately following Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem amid waving palm branches, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that his next stop is to clear out the temple. What does the clearing of the temple have to do with palms and the parade from earlier? Last and most importantly, what do these two events have to say to *us* as we prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus in churches divided by race and class?

The temple and palms do speak with a common voice. They reveal God's vision for peace between the ethnicities and our reconciliation under the universal kingship of Jesus. To hear that common voice, we must pay close attention to the Scriptures that Jesus uses to interpret his actions.

Beyond Humility

Palm Sunday begins with Jesus on the outskirts of Jerusalem instructing his disciples to bring him a donkey to ride into the city. The Gospel writers make it clear that this royal gesture is a dramatic enactment

of Zechariah 9:9. The section quoted in the Gospels says, “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt” (John 12:15). The sign of the king of the universe coming on a donkey’s colt has been the fodder for many hymns, possibly the most famous being the line “Ride on! Ride on in majesty in lowly pomp ride on to die; bow thy meek head to mortal pain, then take, O God, thy power and reign.”

In this reading of Jesus’ actions, Palm Sunday reveals his humility. He is not like other kings who enter cities atop war horses in celebration of bloody victory surrounded by those society deems worthy. He is the humble king who saves by dying for the sins of the world. That Jesus cares for the lowly has long been a source of solace for oppressed people of color. The Messiah becomes the foundation of a restored sense of dignity in a culture that often denied their personhood. This interpretation of Palm Sunday has much to commend it, and I have no intention of unraveling it. I do, however, want to highlight a theme that is often missed.

The first rule for understanding Old Testament citations in the New Testament is to go back to the original context and see how that informs the New Testament’s