



MCG
Study Guide
Easter Week
March 28th – April 3rd



Register for our MCG Celebration Potluck
April 10th www.nbbc.ca

Prayer Requests from MCG meeting...

Introduction

Usually a person's last words are very important. When death is approaching they tend to carefully measure what they want to communicate and how they want to be remembered. I can only imagine that when a person is being crucified and fighting for every breath, that the words they speak are not careless.

As we enter into the week leading up to Easter we would like to focus our lessons around what has been traditionally called, "The seven last sayings of Jesus."

Seven times, Jesus speaks from the cross. Over the next seven days we will focus our readings around one of those last words. Each day's devotional will comment upon the readings, except for Good Friday and Easter Sunday which will include the notes for the sermons.

All around the world people will be taking time to meditate on these famous last words of Jesus. My prayer is that you will be enriched as you join with the global church in considering again the passion of Jesus.

Wednesday March 28th – Forgiven. (By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Luke 23:32 - 38

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Jesus stepped out of the glories of heaven to become one of us. Every time I think about this, I find myself in awe as I try to comprehend the significance and glory of this singular act! Inevitably, I realize time and time again that my powers of comprehension are very inadequate for the task.

He dwelt among us and with us. He embarked on the entire human journey – from conception to death on the cross. He did not miss any part of our humanity – He knew all the pains, struggles, temptations and joys of being human. He did that so he could become a high priest, to perfectly represent humanity. When He stepped out of heaven He knew how the story would end! This is why He showed the physical signs of extreme internal struggle and his sweat was comingled with blood as He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asked for the removal of this cup from him if there was any other way, while at the same time submitting his own will to the Father's. Jesus knew there was and is no other way! “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins”.¹

Now he is on the cross shedding His blood – the blood of the perfect God-man for sinful humanity. No longer the blood of bulls and heifers which could only cover sins temporarily – but the blood of the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world! Now He knows that forgiveness will come to all who believe in Him, so He asks the Father to forgive his tormentors for they know not what they do!....but isn't this true of us all? Do we not do things that we do not think through? Do we not say and do things in ignorance and without considering how it may affect our fellow humans? Do we not fail to consider who Christ is and

¹ Hebrews 9:22

what He did for us? But God is not surprised; “For He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust”.² So, He provides ongoing cleansing!

Our great High Priest is now sitting on the right hand of the Father interceding for us continuously. The Holy Spirit prays in our stead – when we do not know how to pray. We are protected, covered and loved each and every day.

What fallen humanity could never accomplish, the shed blood of the Lamb accomplished for us! We are re-united with God, covered with the righteousness of Christ, adopted into God’s family, loved by the Father just as Christ is loved! The resurrection of Christ guarantees that we will forever be with the Lord! Forgiven by God. Do you believe this? Did you receive it? Do you rest in this knowledge? Here is the promise: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”.³

Thank you, Father, for the free gift of salvation! The free gift – the true cost of which to the Father and the Son is incalculable!

Meditation/Application

Is there some area in your life where guilt tends to cling? An event from the past over which you keep beating yourself up? Bring it to Jesus, even if it is for the umpteenth time. Hear Him tell you that you have been forgiven.

Reflecting on the reading:

In verse 36 we are told that he was offered “wine vinegar” to drink. This concoction was meant to deaden the pain that the person was suffering. In Mat. 27:34 we find out that Jesus refused this pain relief. Why do you think He did this?

² Psalms 103:14

³ Romans 8:1

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Who has God put on your mind to attend the Good Friday Gathering with you? (neighbour, co-worker, family, friend)
- Keep those who are grieving in your prayers... Skonberg family, Cathy Fleischman... others.

Thursday March 29th – The Hope of Paradise

Reading Luke 23:39 - 43

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

I have found, as I have aged, that my longing to be with Jesus in paradise has increased. Some days it feels as if the journey is hard and long and I can't wait to be home.

Ever since he was a kid, Bob Goff had a dream to sail across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii. So, Bob and four of his buddies entered the Transpac Race, a semi-annual sailboat race from Los Angeles to Hawaii. With limited sailing skills, Bob and his friends loaded their thirty-five-foot sailboat with canned chili and bottled water and set sail for Hawaii. But for Bob and his friends, the most moving part of the journey was the arrival at the finishing line. Bob writes:

There's a tradition in the Transpac Race, that no matter when you finish the race, even if it's two in the morning. When you pull into the Ala Moana Marina in Oahu, there's a guy who announces the name of the boat and every crew member who made the trip It's the same guy, and he's been announcing each boat's arrival at the end of every Transpac Race for decades.

Just when we came to the end of our supplies, we sailed across the finish line just off Diamond Head and into the marina. It was a few hours before dawn. It had been sixteen days since we set out from Los Angeles in our little boat knowing very little about navigation. Suddenly, the silence was broken by a booming voice over a loudspeaker announcing the name of our tiny boat Then he started announcing the names of our ragtag crew like

The word “Paradise” is a Persian word meaning a “walled garden.” When a Persian King wished to do one of his subjects a very special honour he made him a companion of the garden, and he was chosen to walk in the garden with the King.⁴

⁴ Barclay, Willian. Commentary on The Gospel of Luke, 1955, 299.

he was introducing heads of state. One by one he announced all of our names with obvious pride in his voice, and it became a really emotional moment for each of us onboard.

When he came to my name, he didn't talk about how few navigation skills I had or the zigzag course I'd led us on to get there. He didn't tell everyone I didn't even know which way north was or about all my other mess-ups. Instead, he just welcomed me in from the adventure like a proud father would. When he was done, there was a pause and then in a sincere voice his last words to the entire crew were these: "Friends, it's been a long trip. Welcome home." Because of the way he said it, we all welled up and fought back tears. I wiped my eyes as I reflected in that moment about all the uncertainty that had come with the journey, all the sloppy sailing and how little I knew. But none of that mattered now because we had completed the race.

I've always thought that heaven might be kind of a similar experience After we each cross the finish line in our lives, I imagine it will be like floating into the Hawaiian marina when our names were announced, one by one. At the end of our lives, after our many mistakes and midcourse corrections, our loving Heavenly Father will simply say, "Friends, it's been a long trip. Welcome home."

One day, because of what Jesus did on the cross for us we will be in Paradise with Him where we will hear Him say, "Welcome home".

Meditation/Application

Just as we will look forward to a coming vacation and allow ourselves to anticipate it, allow yourself the luxury of thinking about heaven. Who are you looking forward to seeing? What are you most anticipating? Imagine yourself there even now.

Prayer Points:**Reflecting on the reading:**

There is no doubt that placing Jesus between two thieves was to further humiliate Him. To have him associated with robbers and murderers. Do you think Jesus was ashamed to be associated with them? Why or why not?

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Tonight, we join together at 8pm for online prayer gathering. You can go to www.freeconference.com or call* in at (647) 946-8253 and enter access code 8051842
*you must have a Canada wide long-distance plan
- Prepare yourself for Easter weekend by finding a place of quiet for a set amount of time: use a timer if needed. Consider fasting for a day.

Good Friday March 30th – The Bitter Sweet

Reading John 19:23 - 27

“...he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.”

Sermon Notes:

The bitterness of Jesus passion included...

- The bitterness of _____.

In the dark cave where bitterness leads...

- Our _____ is clarified.
- Our _____ is shaped.
- God _____ Himself.

Meditation/Application

As you think about today’s sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- What impact did our gathering have on you today?
- Pray that your story (polaroid) would speak of God’s story of changing ‘Bitter Into Sweet’; making all things new.

Saturday March 31st – Forsaken? (By NBBC’s Veronika Bankuti)

Reading Matthew 27:45 – 49

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

We don’t have to search for long in the news and on line to find stories indicating that people, regardless of their age, tend to react badly to feeling abandoned. The various school shootings in the US were all committed by young people whose early life had been very troubling. It seems they were never rooted in a loving family. They were bullied in school, they never quite fit in. They felt superfluous, discarded, so they struck out, wanting to inflict on others the pain they carried inside. Statistics tell us that in the senior population there is one fear that is common to all and voiced more often than any other – it is the fear of loneliness. Feeling like you have outlived your usefulness and there are few people who really care. The fear of not being seen and heard as unique individuals with our very own foibles, talents, gifts and life stories – leaves us feeling forsaken. This feeling opens wide the door to hopelessness, and those who have no hope soon find no reason to get out of bed in the morning.

Jesus, the only begotten Son of the living God is the one person we would not expect to feel this way. In eternity He has never been apart from the Father. They were perfect in unity but there came a time when Jesus stepped out of eternity and became man. He came to die for humanity and by doing so create a bridge that leads all those who believe in Him back to the Father.

Scripture does not tell us how long Jesus was separated from the Father but we know that “God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”⁵

Holy God cannot look upon sin – and on the cross Jesus became sin! So, God turned His face away from Jesus, our sin-bearer. The feeling of being forsaken by the Father must have been more unbearable than the

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:21

physical pain and even the weight of all sin. So, he cried out in utter agony: “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” Significant to note the separation Jesus expresses by the way He calls out to God – not to his Father! Forsaken on the cross? – YES. While forsaken, was Jesus in the midst of the perfect will of God – YES! The proof would come early on Sunday morning!

Because of this act, we who believe in Him need never feel forsaken, for He promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. He is not like men, who often change their minds and can give or withhold their affection at any time! God never changes. This is one of His most amazing attributes. I often go back to this very attribute in my prayers and devotions and repeat this wonderful promise back to Him who made it. In times of difficulty, when we are face to face with the wrath of men, when we can find no one to stand with us – what a joy to remember that God is always with us for He promised He would be, and He cannot lie! He is indeed the God of all comfort.

Meditation/Application

Most of us can think of a time when people abandoned us either physically, emotionally or relationally. What type of abandonment do you think Jesus was experiencing?

Reflecting on the reading:

In the times of Jesus, they did not reference Bible passages with chapter and verse but by the first line of a major section. Jesus is quoting from the first line of Psalm 22. Read this Psalm and answer why you think Jesus may have been referencing this passage.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- *We can often feel that we have been abandoned or forsaken. Who might God put on your heart in your Missional Community to connect with and pray for?*
- *Pray for our single parents, shut-ins, elderly and children who can at times particularly feel abandoned.*

Sunday April 1st – The Sweet and Savoury

Reading John 19:28 - 29

Sermon Notes:

Seeing the world in light of the resurrection.

- We see echoes of _____ but we cannot be _____ to think it's good enough.
- We see it's _____ but we cannot _____ of seeing it get better.
- We rejoice that it will one day be _____ but we cannot _____ back simply waiting.
- We live in this world as God's _____ and the resurrection of Jesus give us _____ to seek His kingdom come.

Meditation/Application

As you think about today's sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- A day where foolishness is made known. The cross is foolishness to some. Pray for those people to see its power and to those who have experienced God's forgiveness, to live in its power.
- Please pray for those who lead our leadership teams:
Shari Markovich – Elders
Wayne Dewhurst – Council
Anicilla Ho-Young – Board
Merv Budd – Staff

Monday April 2nd – Finishing Well. (By NBBC's Blair Clark)**Reading** John 19:30

"It is finished."

One of the ways that people can be divided into simple categories is by identifying them as either "finishers" or "non-finishers". For example, my wife Janet finished her doctoral program, I did not finish mine. Therefore, in this simple category of doctoral program completion, she is a finisher, I am a non-finisher. However, nobody likes to be identified as a non-finisher, so if you were to ask me about it, I would identify lots of other things that I have finished - and I might also point out a few things that Janet has not finished, just to keep it fair. The reality is that all of us can identify things that we have finished, and if pressed, things that we have not finished. However, if we were to look at the totality of a person's life, we would be able to conclude whether that person was generally a "finisher" or a "non-finisher".

In most cases, finished projects bring with them a clear sense of satisfaction, but there are also times when we acknowledge that it is finished, and we do so with a sense of resignation or regret, even failure. Perhaps it's the admission that one's marriage is over. Or maybe you had a dream of starting your own business, but as you file for bankruptcy you admit that your dream is finished. I meet many young people with dreams of being professional athletes, doctors, lawyers, successful politicians, and for too many of them, the day eventually comes when they realize that it is finished, and they won't achieve their goal.

Jesus was a finisher. At its most basic level, His statement indicated that His life ended, and He died. In this sense, all of us will one day be finishers as we will all die - unless of course Christ returns first. In Christ's case, finishing meant an end to suffering and to the physical and verbal abuse. Jesus died, knowing what was next, and was ready for it. When you come to realize that your physical life is over, will you be confident of what is coming next, and will you be ready for it? The brilliant Stephen Hawking just died and, in spite of all that he knew and

speculated on, from a faith perspective it appears that he neither knew what was next nor was he ready for it.

At a much deeper level, Jesus was also announcing that His mission in coming to earth to die for the sins of all humanity was finished. The debt was paid. Sin was atoned for. It was finished. But Jesus also came to earth to show us His Father and His love for us, and to show us how we could live in obedience to the Father's will. And that too, was finished, as Jesus was "obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil.2:8).

I don't particularly care if your latest home improvement project is finished or not (although I would like you to have the satisfaction that comes from finishing it) but I do care if you are finishing your life well in Christ. I care if you are living in obedience to the Father right to the end. I care that, at the point you know your life is over, you will be confident in knowing what comes next and that you will be ready for it.

The apostle Paul was also a finisher. In 2 Tim.4:7-8 he confidently states, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day. . ."

Meditation/Application

As you think about your Christian walk, what hinderances are keeping you from finishing strong? Think of one small step you might take to begin to overcome one of those hinderances. Why not share it with someone to help hold you accountable?

Reflecting on the reading:

When we read that Jesus "bowed his head and gave up his spirit," the word translated as "bowed his head" more literally means handed over. It is as if Jesus' life was not so much taken from Him but given by Him. Do you think this is significant? (You may want to see John10:17-18)

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- After school drop-in at NBBC tonight - they are quite energetic. Pray for future leaders and mentors for this group.
- Pray for protection and spiritual growth for your family. Thank God for the ways He is evident in them. (make a list of Godly characteristics you see below)

Tuesday April 3rd – Trust. (By NBBC's Blair Clark)

Reading Luke 23:44 - 49

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

In these last words, Jesus is copying a prayer that many pious Jews would pray prior to going to sleep at night. Just as devout Jews entrusted their non-waking hours to their heavenly Father, so Jesus was trusting all that would transpire next in His life until He awoke again in resurrection to his Father.

I enjoy the times when I get to put our young grandchildren to bed. I love the hugs and kisses. I love snuggling with them. I love the questions that they ask, even if it is an attempt to delay the inevitable, but I also love the simple trust that they demonstrate as they go to sleep.

What I have observed, though, both with our children when they were young and now with our grandchildren, is that when fear enters the picture, trust is broken and sleep is difficult. A TV cartoon with monsters can lead to fear of one being under the bed. An experience of conflict or exclusion during the day can raise doubts about whether or not they are loved and have worth.

Jesus' last hours and his death were excruciatingly painful. They included experiences of betrayal, abandonment, abuse, humiliation and torture. Yet as He is about to die, in this statement, Jesus presents Himself as one calmly going to sleep and praying his final 'good night' prayer! The effect of this is so powerful that the Roman centurion witnessing it is led to conclude that Jesus was a righteous man, undeserving of the judgment and death to which he had been sentenced.

I believe there are two reasons for the trust that Jesus demonstrates in this statement. The first is that He knows intimately the One in whom He has placed His trust. It is His heavenly Father. It is a relationship that Jesus had nurtured through prayer, through obedience and through

participation in his Father’s mission, so, even in suffering and death, His trust in His Father could not be shaken.

Second, Jesus understood the difference between His physical body and His spirit. He knew that even though His enemies could kill his body, they could not destroy His soul (or spirit). In Luke 12:4-7 Jesus counsels His disciples not to fear those who can only destroy their bodies, but rather to fear the One who has authority to throw you into hell. The destruction of His physical body by His executioners had no impact whatsoever on His spirit, because that had been entrusted to God.

The old hymn, *I Know Whom I Have Believed*, has a wonderful chorus taken from the Apostle Paul’s declaration in II Tim.1:12, “But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed to Him, against that day.” Jesus knew who it was that He was trusting, and in the middle of pain, suffering, humiliation and death, it gave Him the ability to peacefully breathe His last, and to witness to the Roman centurion that His was a righteous life.

Preparing for your MCG

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- POTLUCK: Be mindful of a story you might share regarding the importance of MCG regular group meeting together. (ie. What it means to you, or how the group has seen God work through them or in them)
- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day study. What made an impression on you or what confused you.
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

Prayer Requests:

Record the prayer requests that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week.

- _____
- _____

Missional Community Group (MCG) Covenant

We desire to grow as followers of Jesus who represent Him and His Kingdom well in all of our life. We recognize that God's plan is for us to grow in and through relationships with other like-minded disciples. As those who identify as neighbourhood missionaries we enter into this covenant so that we might be transformed by God's grace and that together we might be transforming agents in our neighbourhood.

To this end, this year, we therefore covenant to:

- Meet regularly for weekly encouragement, accountability, and fellowship in our Missional Community Group and corporately with all of NBBC.
- Seek to grow in likeness to Jesus by engaging in NBBC MCG's shared practices.
- Nurture loving relationships within our Missional Community, accepting others as Christ has accepted us.
- Faithfully steward the resources that God has given us: time, abilities, resources and energy.
- Together discern where God is at work and join Him in His mission to bring the Kingdom of God to our neighbourhood.

In all that we covenant, we recognize that we are dependant upon the grace of God to enable us and so we joyfully enter this covenant in hope of what He might do in and through us.

Missional Community Group Shared Practices

1. Daily engage in reading Scripture and pray for God to bless NBBC in its missional calling.
2. Weekly purposely and intentionally bless another person.
3. Monthly practise table fellowship with someone in your Missional Community.
4. Respond to the Spirit's prompting as you sense Him leading and directing.
5. As opportunities arise, share with others the stories of what God is doing in your life.