

Lent.

Devotions



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# foreword

“O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

John 17:25-26

In this period of Lent, let's once again take time to reflect individually and as a community how the love of God has been shed generously in our hearts through the passion of Christ so that our hearts may once again be renewed.

We have designed this devotion series to be read with weekly DG materials and Sunday messages. In particular we will focus on the servitude, agony and betrayal of Jesus. As a community, apart from the DG discussions, join in the pre-dawn prayer for a time of experiential reflection and prayer. This Lent journey will culminate in the Good Friday CPR (Church Praying for Revival) before we celebrate the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus on Easter Sunday.

Join us on this journey! Open your hearts and minds and prepare to meet with our Lord! Maranatha! Amen!

# Anointing of Jesus

JOHN 12:1-11

The story of Mary anointing Jesus shortly before His death had a great impact in my walk with the Lord Jesus. I have read and re-read this story many times, asking myself, like the disciples, "Why is Mary wasting this expensive perfume on Jesus, when this expensive perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor?" But Jesus defends Mary by replying, "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

This is a story about how not to waste your life. It is also a story about motivation: why do you do what you do for the Lord? Do you serve Him for the satisfaction you get when you see results? It is satisfying to see Him use you, but that's the wrong motivation. Do you serve Him because it helps others? Again, it's gratifying to see others helped, but that's the wrong motivation for serving Him. The true motive for serving Christ is because He is worthy of everything you can do for Him and because you love Him and want to please Him because He gave Himself for you on the cross. We learnt this from Mary's act of devotion.

Mary's anointing Jesus with this perfume was costly. We don't know where Mary got 12 ounce jar of perfume. Judas estimates that it could have been sold for 300 denarii, which was equivalent to about 300 days' pay for a working man. Mary's action was extravagantly costly. She could have sold this jar of perfume, given 90% of the money to help a lot of poor people, and still have a sizeable amount to give to the Lord.

The Lord rebukes Judas and disciples (John 12:8) "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." He was not saying that we should not help the poor, but He was saying, "I am more worthy of your

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unselfish devotion than all the world's poor put together!" He was accepting the worship that Mary gave Him because she rightly saw that He is worthy of all that we can give Him and even more.

Is your devotion to the Lord costing you financially? If He bought you with His blood, you don't own anything. It's all His and He can direct you to give some or all of it for His kingdom purposes. Most of us would have sold the perfume, give ten percent to the Lord, and pocketed the rest to spend. But Mary gave it all because she knew that Jesus is worth it. So what will you give to Jesus?

*Ps Elaine*

# The Triumphal Entry

JOHN 12:12-19

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem marked the beginning of the final week of His earthly ministry. We call it "Palm Sunday" because the crowd welcomed Jesus with palm branches, and palm branch is a symbol of victory. Ever since Jesus started His ministry, He always warned those He had healed not to tell others about Him, or He'd retreat to isolated places just to avoid the crowd. But on this day, Jesus chose to ride on a donkey to enter Jerusalem in the midst of a large cheering crowd. It's because now was time for the Son of Man to enter into His glory, that was why Jesus made public His claim to be the Messiah and King of Israel. And this is the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, "Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zec 9:9b, cf 12:15)

It must have been a spectacular sight to have a large crowd waving palm branches with great cheers to welcome Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey. Amongst the crowd, some had seen Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and some had heard about this miraculous sign, so they went out to meet Jesus. They cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (12:13b) Similar to "hallelujah", "hosanna" is an expression of praise, but it carries a sense of "plea for salvation."

Were the people genuinely pleaded for "salvation"? Perhaps! But the kind of "salvation" they hoped for was different from the salvation which Jesus was to accomplish. The praises they lavished on Jesus was not because they recognised Him as their Saviour from sin, but it was out of their desire for a messianic deliverer who would lead them in a revolt against Rome. It was no wonder when Jesus did not meet their expectations, their shouts of

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“Hosanna” changed to “Crucify Him” within just a few days. Many who hailed Him as a hero had eventually rejected and abandoned Him.

Where would you be if you were to be there on this first Palm Sunday? Will you be among the disciples who truly welcomed Him, or among the skeptical crowds? The mission of Jesus’ triumphal entry was to conquer the domain of darkness with love, grace, mercy, and He sacrificed Himself for our salvation. The cross is a sign of victory. Jesus has overcome sin and death. Has Jesus already entered into your heart triumphantly? May our Lord Jesus own our whole being for His glory and His purpose!

*Ps Guo Fen*

# Rejection of Israel

MARK 11:12-20

Our Lord's condemning of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple were both symbolic acts that illustrated the sad spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. In spite of her many privileges and opportunities, Israel was outwardly fruitless (the tree) and inwardly corrupt (the temple).

It was unusual for Jesus to act in judgement (John 3:17), yet there comes a time when this is the only thing God can and will do!

## **Lessons from the fig tree & temple**

First, there is a lesson on failure: Israel had failed to be fruitful vine for God. In the Old Testament, the fig tree is associated with the nation of Israel (see Jer 8:13, Hos. 9:10; Nah 3:12). Like the fig tree in Mk 11, our Lord cursed it because of its fruitlessness, Israel had "nothing but leaves." The Lord came looking for fruit, but she has none to show!

Secondly, there is a lesson on spiritual hypocrisy. The temple is meant for the Jewish people and proselytes from other nations to come and offer sacrifices and prayers to God but the religious authorities (Chief Priests and Scribes) of the day turned the temple into a house of thieves. How? They permitted "religious market" to be set up in the court of the Gentiles and received share of the profits from the merchants, the merchants in turn charged high prices for the good and services from the pilgrims. In so doing these religious leaders deprived the common worshippers from worshipping God.

Jesus expects spiritual fruits from his children, are you bearing fruits for Christ?

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There are 3 kinds of fruits believers are expected to bear:

1. Fruit of the Spirit – Gal 5:22;
2. Fruit of wining souls – John 15:8;
3. Fruit of good works – Col 1:10.

Like the religious leaders in Jesus' days, are you living double lives – looking good on the outside but corrupt from the inside?

Search me O God and know my heart today, see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the path of righteousness for your name's sake! Forgive me, many times I did not walk my talk and failed to live the authentic Christian life. Help me to bear fruit for you from this day forth, fruit that will last for your glory sake.

*Ps Lawrence*

# Questioning the authority of Jesus

MARK 11:27-12:12

As the official guardians of the Law, the members of Sanhedrin had both the right and responsibility to investigate anyone who claimed to be sent by God, and that includes Jesus (see Deut 18:15-22).

However, these men did not have open minds or sincere motives. They were not seeking truth; they were looking for evidences to use to destroy Jesus (Mark 11:18).

Jesus of course knew what was in their hearts, so He countered their question with another question and exposed their hypocrisy.

Why take them all the way back to John the Baptist? For a very good reason: God does not teach us new truths if we have rejected the truth He had already revealed, Jesus is the Truth!

This basis principle is expressed in John 7:17. The religious leaders had not accepted what John had taught, so why should God say anything more to them? Had they obeyed John's message, they would have gladly submitted to Christ's authority, for John came to present Jesus the Messiah to the nation.

## **Lesson from the Parable of the Vineyard**

The vineyard represents Israel (Ps 80:8-16, Isa 5:1-7). In order to retain his legal rights to the property, the owner had to receive produce from the tenants much like a tenant paying rent in today's context. However the tenants refused to give the legal owner anything; they wanted to claim the vineyard for themselves.

It also explains why the owner continued to send agents to the tenants.

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It was purely a question of authority and ownership. Finally, the owner resorted in sending his son (heir) to claim his share of produce. In a bid to claim the vineyard for themselves they killed the son (John 11:47-53).

Jesus then asks a pertinent question; "What shall, therefore the Lord of the vineyard do?" The leaders answered the question first and thereby condemned themselves (Matt 21:41), and then Jesus repeated their answer as solemn verdict from the Judge. The Servant-Judge announced a doubled verdict: they have not only rejected the Son, but they had also refused the "Cornerstone" There can only be one conclusion and consequence for those who reject and refuse Jesus authority over their lives! – Judgement.

Our heart represents the vineyard of God. Do you submit it to the ownership and authority of Christ? Which area/s of your life needs to let go and let God take control?

Lord, forgive me for the times I did not submit all areas of my life to your ownership and authority. Jesus I now surrender my (name "unsundered" area/s of your life) to you. Please help me to let You to take full control from now on!

*Ps Lawrence*

# Identity of Jesus

MARK 12:13-40

In this passage we see Jesus engaging in conversations with four different groups of people on different occasions. Each of these conversations portrays an essential aspect of the identity of Jesus.

First, we have the Pharisees and the Herodians who, in their usual cunning demeanour, attempt to trap Jesus by asking him a clever question, whether it would be right to pay taxes to Caesar. This is very similar to the circumstance on another occasion; when the Pharisees drag a woman caught in the act of adultery to Jesus and asking Him whether they should cast stones on her.

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Jesus' answer shows us that he is God. He tells us that Caesar does not have all authority. There are some things that should be rendered to God alone. What is it? 'Love the Lord your God with all your mind and with all your strength. (v30)

Do you love your God with all your mind and with all your strength?

Later, Jesus has a conversation with the Sadducees. They are well educated, sophisticated scholars who do not believe in immortality. They believe that when the body dies, the soul dies with it.

Jesus proves them utterly wrong!

Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

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Those loved ones of ours who have died are not dead. They have merely crossed over and there will be a grand reunion one day. In the story "Chronicles of Narnia" written by C S Lewis, he said, "Life is like a book. We mortals are only at the introductory page. But when we finally cross over to the other side of the shore we begin to enter into chapter one of this unending story book, and every chapter is better than the one before." This is the essence of Easter and it is this assurance of resurrection that keep us going.

The third conversation Jesus has is with a teacher of the law. Here he once again reinforces his identity as God and reiterates the commandments that to love God with all..... and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

May we go back to our first love! May we return to intimacy with him! This is the cry of our Lord's heart. Will you heed it?

Finally, he converses with a large crowd. In this conversation he shows that even before David was, He is.

Indeed, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the God of the poor and needy, the widows and the orphans. He is your God, and he is mine.

Jesus is God almighty.

Jesus is the resurrection of life.

Jesus deserves the whole of our being.

Jesus is the creator of the universe.

Yes, Friday is inevitable; but Sunday is coming!

*Dn Daniel Soh*

# The Widow's Mite

MARK 12:41-44

In the story of The Widow's Mite, Jesus made a comment on the giving of a widow. Even though she was very poor because her husband had died, this widow was a wonderful example of what it means to be generous and to give with a pure heart. Jesus wanted His disciples – and us – to follow her example when we give to God and others.

Jesus takes notice of the 'rich' giving offerings. They were probably well dressed. They put in a lot. He would have heard this by the sound made as they threw their coins in. And then he notices 'a poor widow.' Widows are typically poor. They relied on their children or charity for whatever they had. Her clothing would have reflected her poverty. She put in very little. Jesus likely would have heard the slight sound of her offering.

How much did she give? The 'two small copper coins'. It was the smallest denomination of coins in Israel at this time. She gave ALL she had. Jesus teaches an important lesson here. It's not how much you give that matters. It's how much you keep that matters; how much you have left over after you give, that you keep for yourself. The widow gave more because she gave sacrificially. In fact, she gave everything. She held nothing back from God. The others did not give sacrificially.

In this story, we learnt that when giving to the Lord, God's ways are different than our ways. We think it's all about how much you give. We are impressed with people who give large gifts. We honour them and we name buildings after them. But as we learnt in this story, it's not how much you give. It's whether you gave sacrificially. So when the person gives thousands of dollars to the church out of their abundance – that's great, but the poor person who gives very little money, but gives sacrificially, has given more.

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We can give sacrificially in other ways. Our time, our homes in terms of hospitality, sharing other things we own, and our lives – serving God and possibly facing persecution or death.

For example:

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. He held nothing back from God.

In QBC's Church Rebuilding, many gave sacrificially for the love of God and love for church for next generation. This includes our children and elderly who gave their 5 loaves and 2 fishes to God for our church building fund.

Finally, is God calling you to give sacrificially to Him? Your money, your time, your possessions, your life? What might God be calling you to?

*Ps Elaine*

# Lament over Jerusalem

MATT 23:13-39

These are among the most touching words ever uttered by our Lord. They reveal his strong patriotism, his deep human affection, the greatness of the salvation he bought, and at the same time the frustration of the hopes which these things naturally raise, owing to the stubborn self-will of the Jews. Here is a lesson for all time.

## Lessons from this lament

### I. THE GUILTY CITY.

No city was more privileged. Jerusalem was the favoured city of a favoured land. No city was more sinful. When account is taken of her privileges, Jerusalem excels in guilt as she excels in favour. The most favoured people prove to be the most ungrateful and rebellious. She murders her prophets. She sealed her guilt by delivering her Messiah up to death.

### II. THE COMPASSIONATE SAVIOUR.

Jesus is heartbroken and grieved to think of the doom of the once beloved city of David. It was the city of God, BUT it was also a doomed city.

### III. THE WONDERFUL SAVIOUR.

1. He comes to save. This is his great mission, and his salvation begins with "the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).
2. He is able to save. By his death on the cross, anyone who believed him shall be saved (John 3:16).
3. He offers to save. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10).

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Reflect and recall your salvation story.

*Thank You Jesus for Your love to me  
Thank You Jesus for Your grace so free  
I'll lift my voice to praise Your name  
Praise You again and again  
You are my ev'rything  
You are my Lord*

*Ps Lawrence*

# Things to Come

MARK 13:1-23

This was the conversation that Jesus had with the disciples before His crucifixion. He prophesized about the things to come: wars, tribulation, persecution, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. In reality, many of these things have already happened. In the year A.D. 70, the Romans attacked Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed and the Jews faced persecution. Jesus' message was not only meant for the Jews during that time, but also for our current generation who are faced with the things to come. Therefore, we must keep watch, be hopeful and persevere to the end. Those who persevere to the end will be saved.

Jesus, before His crucifixion and own suffering, intentionally prepared the disciples for the trials and suffering that was to come. This helped to build their ability to persevere. We too must be actively watchful and not lose hope, while waiting for the return of Christ. This watchful attitude is not dependent on whether the end will be fulfilled in our time, but how we can anticipate the Lord's return in our daily lives. This also includes how we can experience God in the final days of our lives. Even though there are already signs of the end time but the end has not actually come, Jesus continues to remind us to be vigilant and not fall into temptation. He also reminds us to press on in the midst of our trials, actively share the gospel with the multitudes, and anticipate the Lord's second coming. Only with this hope, can we persevere to the end.

Today, how much do we hope for the return of Christ? These words spoken by Jesus before His crucifixion, again reminded us to be actively watchful and share the gospel before He returns (Mark 13:10).

*Ps Steven*

# Washing the Disciples' feet

JOHN 13:1-17

Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world. Just before he left, Jesus desired to show His disciples the full extent of His love. This was because Jesus is love- it was his character. He already knew the ultimate goal in life - that He came from God and will return to God. The time had already come for Him to be crucified on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. And the last act that Jesus did was out of His deep love for the disciples - he washed their feet.

However, His disciples did not understand what Jesus did. They did not know that Jesus was modelling what it means to be a humble servant. He was in fact teaching them to serve one another. Yet it was only till much later that the disciples understood what Jesus did. Nonetheless, eventually the disciples were willing to live their lives for and even die for Jesus. Till now, thousands of believers still live like Christ and do what He had modelled for us. He served His disciples and washed their feet! What Jesus did was truly beyond our imagination and leaves us in wonder still.

In John 13, Peter said to Jesus "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Jesus later said "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." Now, imagine if Peter had firmly refused to let Jesus wash his feet perhaps He did not understand what Jesus did and why He did that. Perhaps then he did not know Jesus and would in fact have no relationship with Jesus. Perhaps it may even mean Peter did not understand who Jesus is and what salvation means. Indeed this is a serious matter. Like Peter, have we sometimes, knowingly or unknowingly, misunderstood or even rejected the grace of God?

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Jesus left an example for us to follow in this situation. He wanted His disciples to wash one another's feet and serve, forgive, love and accept one another, the way He did. Blessed are those who obey and do as Jesus did. Jesus showed us that He loved the world and loved His disciples till the end. "Till the end" means, in the original Greek meaning, that He loves us till the end of time and that He loved us fully, completely and perfectly. It was perfect love for us.

*Ps Candy*

# I am the Way, the Truth and the Life

JOHN 14:1-6

On the last night before His betrayal and death, Jesus was speaking about His departure (Jn 13:33, 36), so as to prepare His disciples for the days ahead. Yet, the disciples didn't seem to understand Him. Therefore, Jesus patiently continued speaking more about the Father's house – heaven, describing the place He was going to "prepare" for them. (14:2-3) While Jesus thought the disciples would know the way to where He was going, Thomas asked, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5) Consequently, Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (14:6)

Jesus is the Way to the Father because He is the truth of God and the life of God. There is no other path to Heaven! No other way to the Father. Jesus is the path to salvation. And to all who believe in Him, Jesus made a promise that if He went to "prepare" a place, then He will come again and bring them to Himself, to be with Him forever. (14:3)

How did Jesus "prepare" a place for us in Heaven? It was through His crucifixion on the cross and His resurrection as acts of preparation. Our dwelling place in Heaven is prepared for us through the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He has made a way for us to come into the Father's house, a door that no one can shut!

Can you imagine how terrified and heartbroken the disciples were, when they saw Master, whom they had been following and in whom they placed their hopes in as the Messiah, being arrested and crucified? But the story doesn't end with crucifixion, for the disciples also saw and met with the resurrected Christ! Therefore, Jesus comforted His disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." (14:1) Jesus was

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saying, "Just as you believe in God, you are to have the same faith in Me too. I am the Way to the Father. Follow Me."

We may have been shattered or burdened by the brokenness in and of this world. But let's fix our eyes on Jesus. His suffering on the Cross and His victorious resurrection have made a Way for to the Father. "... this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come." (Heb 13:14) We have a home in heaven, a place there'll be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain. Let's keep trusting in Jesus, follow Him. He is the Way to the Father, the Way that leads us Home.

*Po Guo Fen*

# The Vine and the Branches

JOHN 15:1-11

“What shall I do for the Lord?” Have we ever asked ourselves this question? Yet we also know that we cannot do anything on our own. If we relied on our own strength, we may become perfectionistic, seeking to meet the standards that cannot be achieved on our own. In that case, we may feel disappointed. On the other hand, Scripture tells us that Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches. He is the source of life and all things come from Him. When we look at a tree and its branches, do we consider how the branches are connected to the vine? What is their deep connection?

The sole purpose of the vine is to bear fruit. If it cannot bear fruit, what good is it? Branches that are withered and fallen deserve to be thrown into the fire. It is useless. Similarly branches that do not bear fruit are useless. What then shall we do in light of this? Scripture tells us that God is the gardener who cuts off every branch that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. He will cut off branches that are self-reliant, self-preserving, self-righteous and proud. Accepting Christ is a once in a lifetime experience but allowing Christ to be Lord is a daily journey. If we remain in Jesus and Jesus remains in us, we will bear much fruit. Apart from Him we can do nothing. The relationship between us and Jesus is to remain in Him. We can live apart from Him. The fruit we bear is a manifestation of His life in us.

Andrew Murray once said, as the branches remain in the vine, it is not a one-off experience, rather, it continually grows. As we remain in the Lord on this journey, the Lord continually gives us life and takes control of all that we are.

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“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”  
John 15:4

May we bear much fruit for Him!

*Ps Candy*

# Promise of the Holy Spirit

JOHN 16:1-15

John 16:7-11

<sup>7</sup>“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. <sup>8</sup>“And He, when He comes, will convict the world *concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*; <sup>9</sup>**concerning** sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup>and **concerning** righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; <sup>11</sup>and **concerning** judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

In one of my journal entries in March last year, I wrote, “Recently, I have a longing for God that seems to be unsated through Scripture reading, message preparation, or prayer. I know I am loved and accepted but I realize that everything I do to a certain degree is tainted by sin, pride, and self!”

This morning as we prepare ourselves during this Lent period, do we feel something amiss in our journey with the Lord? The text at hand reminds us that Jesus did not just pack up and leave. Instead He sent the Helper/ counselor (paracletos). This word was used of legal assistants who pleaded a cause or presented a case. This Counselor is the promised Spirit who came into the world in a new and distinctive sense on the day of Pentecost. Jesus lists three of the Spirit’s ministries: to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. (1) The Holy Spirit acts as an attorney to expose our unbelief and personalize our sins so that we may be brought to repentance. (2) He also shows us the futility of self righteousness and our need for righteousness in Christ. (3) Finally, the Spirit shows that Satan has been judged and now stands condemned. These are three ways in which we see the grace of God, in forgiving our sins, providing righteousness and removing our condemnation.

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Have there been times when the Spirit convicts you of your sins? Other times bringing Jesus dearer to your heart? Or assuring you that while the ruler of this world is now condemned, there is no more condemnation for those in Christ. It is the Spirit who indwells in us that gives us intimacy with God. He brings us back through His word to the heart of our faith – that is Christ. My journal entry in Mar 2017 ended with a prayer, “Holy Spirit of God, thank you for showing me Jesus.”

As we reflect on the Spirit’s work in your life, take time to whisper a prayer of gratitude that we are not abandoned or alone.

*Ps Isaac*

# Suffering Servant

ISA 53:1-12

Isaiah 53:5

<sup>5</sup> But He was *pierced* through for our *transgressions*,  
 He was *crushed* for our *iniquities*;  
 The **chastening** for our *well-being* fell upon Him,  
 And by His **scourging** we are *healed*.

Isa 53 is most well-known for the above text that claims promises of physical healing. However the verbs "scourging" and "chastening" are singular – one stroke – referring to his death on the cross. Furthermore I have arranged the text in a way to reveal parallelism in Hebrew poetry. The terms 'pierced', 'crushed' 'chastening' and 'scourging' are figures of speech of actions which describe the main event – His death. Secondly, the adjective 'healed' parallels 'well-being', which in turn are a contrast against 'transgressions' and 'iniquities'.

So what Isaiah is describing here is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. The healing and well-being that the prophet refers to are for our transgressions and iniquities. In short, our sins are forgiven. Death is gone. We are healed! That is why we have eternal live now. But we only experience it fully when Christ comes again.

Isa 53:5 is not a text that promises physical well-being and healing, at least not in the here and now. This distracts us from the main message that Christ is a suffering Messiah. Isa 53:5 is quoted in 1 Pe 2:21-25. The context? Peter was dealing with saints who are suffering and facing persecution rather than experiencing healing and blessing.

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Indeed, a Christianity that claims God wants to bless us with good health, financial freedom and worry free life, short changes a believer. This brand of Christianity does not promise too much but too little. It calls our attention to the things of this world that are temporal and in so doing miss out on the greater treasures and blessings of the eternal.

Whatever challenges you are facing in this season of Lent, remember that you have a suffering Messiah. As such, He understands and He makes good out of our situations (Ro 8:28). "To see suffering as a good thing is something that can only come from God – not faked, not manufactured. It simply brings us to the end of ourselves and there we find the still small voice, not speaking in the whirl wind or the earthquake or fire, but in a sound of gentle blowing."

O Lamb of God, you were led to the slaughter and yet remained silent. Help me to walk in your footsteps and not revile in returned when being reviled. Instead, to entrust myself to Him who judges righteously for I have returned to the Great Shepherd, the Guardian of my soul (1 Pe 2:21-25).

*Ps Isaac*

# Jesus' High Priestly Prayer

JOHN 17:1-25

Jesus is our Great High Priest. His prayer in John 17 reveals the depth of His love for all believers. He wanted His disciples to be filled with the joy of the Lord. The love of the Father is in Jesus, and the love of the beloved son Jesus is in the Father. Similarly, Jesus' love now resides in His disciples, and the love of His disciples in Him. This reflects a perfect unity, a unity of divine love.

What does God the Father give through His Son Jesus Christ? Love, eternal life, truth, and unity.

Love: there is fullness of joy in love.

Eternal life: Believing that the Father is the one true God and that He sent his Son Jesus to die for us brings eternal life.

Truth: The Father gave us the way, the truth and the life: Jesus Christ. The Son obeyed the will of the Father and revealed to the disciples and the rest of the world the truth of God's love. This truth transforms us into God's likeness through the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us the perfect example - He was set apart. Similarly, His disciples are called to be set apart and sanctified by truth. We are sanctified by His truth.

Unity: The love between God the Father and Jesus the son paves the way for Christians to love one another. The love of Jesus is amongst the disciples and the love of the Father is in Jesus. Through this bond of love, Jesus desires for the disciples to be one, so that the world will know that God sent Jesus and God loves them. This is just like how God loves Jesus. Jesus has accomplished the will of God and glorified Him.

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For me, I enjoy the countless blessings of His grace. Stepping into this year of grace, I prayed as my Lord Jesus Christ prayed, that the Father will keep me and hold me: that I may be saved from sins. His grace draws near to me through His word; His word of truth and grace.

As I enter this year of grace, I pray that the love of God will touch me. Let me experience the reality of God's love in my life, so that I can respond to His love.

As I enter this year of grace, may the truth sanctify me! May I love and embrace the truth of God. Let His truth wash over me. His grace will draw near to me.

As I enter this year of grace, I pray that God will grant us unity. This is His will. His grace will draw near to us.

On Good Friday, let us reflect on Jesus' prayer before His death. We must respond to Him: may His love be in us. The world must know that we are set apart and drawn to what is on God's heart. May we be united and be filled with joy. May we be protected from the evil one! May God use His truth to sanctify us! May we be sent out into the world that they may know God's will! His grace draws near to us all. Amen.

*Ps Ivy*

# The Last Supper

LUKE 22:7-34

"After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you"

Luke 22:17

According to ancient Jewish customs, there were four significant cups that disciples had to partake at each Passover festival. Before eating the unleavened bread, they would eat bitter herbs and drink the bitter cup. During the meal of unleavened bread and meat, they would go on to drink a cup that symbolises blessing.

The precious blood of Jesus on the cross has purchased for us the forgiveness of our sins. Since then, all the blessings of God, even his own, have become our cup (Psalm 16:5), this is "the cup of salvation" (Psalm 116:13). The believers share this cup of salvation, showing that we partake in the blood of Christ.

He has borne the curse and we enjoy the blessings. Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins so that we can enjoy the blessings of God.

"Jesus took the cup and gave thanks" – Jesus had a thankful heart, unlike our disgruntled selves. "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD." Psalm 116: 13. The bitter cup was transformed into the cup of salvation. We have eternal life because of this cup of salvation. We can be with God forever.

I give thanks for 2012, when I had a deep revelation about this cup of salvation. Jesus walked the path of suffering and shed precious blood. He was hung on the cross. He suffered. And at the last moment, he said "it

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is finished!” He had finished the work of salvation. He has taken away our sickness and pain, giving us eternal life, health, peace and rest. We rest at the throne of grace while He does His work in us.

The last supper is a symbol of God’s love. He exchanged his life for death, so that that we can live with God forever. We look to Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith.

Reflection on Good Friday:

Do not be discouraged by your present sufferings. Because God has finished the work of salvation for you and I. In our suffering, God fights for us. The battle belongs to the Lord. On the cross of Calvary, we can experience His victory.

*Ps Ivy*

# Agony in Gethsemane

MARK 14:32-42

I had intentionally set up a prayer closet in my office and my home, a place where I can spend intimate moments with my Lord. I believe this was inspired by the Holy Spirit a few years ago. In recent years, I attended the pre-dawn prayer and knelt in the garden of Gethsemane. As I knelt there to pray, I experienced the deep intimacy of prayer – a time where I spend with my dear Father God and experience the joy of simply being His child.

In the valleys and struggles of our life, we need our prayer closet the most.

I also urge you to look for a prayer partner to seek the Lord together. In your darkest moments, you will wait for the Lord, support each other, draw strength from each other, while waiting upon the Lord. The Spirit will lift you up from your depths as you wait for Him together! Amen!

In Mark 14:23, Jesus prayed, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Here we see that in his deepest valleys, Jesus prayed according to the truth and the will of God. In Jesus' darkest moments, He knew the Father's will for Him. Eventually we saw that it was during this trying time of waiting and prayer that He was most vulnerable. Because of His weakness, He saw the grace of God. Grace and strength were upon Him during His weakness. This is the same for us today. God's grace is made perfect in our weakness. That is how the Lord shows that loves us and cares for us.

What if we do not know how to pray? The more we do not know how to pray, the more we need to retreat to our prayer closet. As we become still before God and real before Him, the Lord hears us. He is with us in the valley. He is with us in our prayer closet. As we seek Him we will find Him and we will

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understand His will. And we slowly desire to seek His will instead of ours.

Brothers and sisters, where is your prayer closet? Draw near to Jesus daily – in your prayer closet. You will experience His grace in your weakness. May we experience more of His grace each day!

*Ps Ivy*

# Arrest of Jesus

MATT 26:47-56

The passage today chronicles in detail the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Who were in the party? Judas Iscariot led the pack. Verse 47 says, " ... With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people."

We all know that Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. We also know that ultimately he died a gruesome death. But what led to this sad ending? His is a classic case of someone who had started well but ended terribly. Whatever his character in the beginning, he gradually became the treacherous man that betrayed Christ.

Judas was not created to betray Jesus. He chose to betray Jesus. He started well. He followed Jesus and shared the same hope of the kingdom. Like the other disciples, he left everything and followed Christ, saw the same miracles, heard the same teaching of Christ, even performed some of the ministry. Yet in the end he failed miserably.

Along the way, he allowed greed for money, selfish ambitions, worldliness, and hypocrisy to creep into his life. It was these gradual changes of his values that had taken place within his inner being that led to his ultimate betrayal of his Master and, hence his ultimate self destruction.

And what about the rest of the disciples? Did they stuck on with Jesus when Jesus needed them most? Although they did not do the unthinkable like Judas did, they too had not risen to occasion. At the time when the Lord needed them most, they let Him down. Verse 56 says, " ... Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."

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Let's transport ourselves back to the scene of the garden of Gethsemane; and imagine we were there witnessing the arrest. Which character do you think best represent our feeling and therefore demonstrate our love (or lack of love) for our Lord. Certainly none of us would sink that low as Judas did, and it is unlikely we would be in the party of those carrying swords and clubs. But would we be like the disciples, who at the critical moment, deserted Jesus and fled. Or would we remain faithful to our Lord, irrespective of what circumstance we are put into?

In this season of Lent, may we spend moments to examine our lives, and see if there are traits of Judas Iscariot in our lives, or are we also belonging to the party of the large crowd armed with swords and clubs, demanding that Jesus fit into their perceptions of what a messiah should be like. Or are we like the disciples who have deserted Jesus and fled.

Well if the period of lent ended a notch before Easter Sunday, then there is every justification for the disciples to desert Jesus, for the cross with the dead body was the end of story and there is no more hope after that. But thanks be to God, Lent ends on Easter Sunday. That keeps your faith and mine alive. And faith isn't about not being afraid. Faith means we trust God and acknowledge his presence even when we are afraid, especially when we are afraid.

Do you know the presence of God just in theory, or you know because your soul is intimately intertwined with the soul of God? Let your soul find refreshing in this season of Lent.

"Abide in me, and I in you."

- Jesus Christ

*Dn Daniel Soh*

# Trial and Thorns

MATT 27:11-32

Matthew 27:22-25

<sup>22</sup>Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "**Crucify Him!**" <sup>23</sup>And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "**Crucify Him!**" <sup>24</sup>When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." <sup>25</sup>And all the people said, "**His blood shall be on us and on our children!**"

Today in our Lent reading, Jesus faced the ultimate rejection by the very people He had come to save. As I was on a late night jog around the lake, I was overwhelmed by the fact that I am amongst those who had cried, "Crucify Him! His blood shall be upon me!" On my journey before and even after I became a Christian, I have come to realize that my heart is indeed deceitful above all else (Jer 17:9). But at every turn, I am met with grace! In the night breeze, I felt these words bubbling up:

Going my way with thrills to fulfil

Making choices as I will;

A self-made man I want to be,

Why do I need the one Divine?

Am I amongst those who cried?

"Crucify Him! His blood upon me shall be!"

Running full on towards my dreams;

Only to find them just pipe dreams;

"You be d@mn! Leave me be!"

As I shook my fist at the One Divine;

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Am I amongst those who cried?

“Crucify Him! His blood upon me shall be!”

**A**mazing grace so sweet the sound,

I once was blind but now am found;

A sinner great that I am,

But Christ is the Great I AM;

I am indeed amongst those who cried,

“Crucify Him! His blood upon me shall be!”

**C**omforts and pleasures as worldviews

Saying grace and warming pews

Making choices as I will

Asking Him to bless my fill

Am I amongst those who cried?

“Crucify Him! His blood upon me shall be!”

**E**ver loving and above deceit,

Jesus shows my heart's conceit;

My pride, my comfort and my name

Naked and exposed, I whispered in shame

I am surely amongst those who cried,

“Crucify Him! His blood upon me shall be!”

**D**espair no more, fear not you,

For nothing can separate my love from you;

No more condemnation, are my commands,

As Jesus showed me His nailed pierced hands;

“I am Him who cried, ‘It is finished!’

For you, I was crucified! For you, my blood was shed!”

*Ps Isaac*

# Peter's Denial of Jesus

LUKE 22:54-62

When Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, all the disciples deserted Him and fled (Mt 26:56). But Peter stopped his flight and followed Jesus at a distance when He was taken to the high priest's house. He sat among the crowd around the fire in the courtyard, all the while trying to be inconspicuous. However, he caught the attention of a servant girl. "This man also was with Him," she said. At this point of time, Peter was probably torn between the fear for his own life and concern for what will happen to Jesus. He could have chosen to flee at that time. But instead of fleeing, he chose to deny Jesus so that he could remain there in the courtyard. After a while, someone else looked at him, "You must be one of them!" Peter denied it once again, "I'm not!" And as time gone by, his Galilean accent could not conceal his identity anymore, and another insisted, "Certainly this man also with Him, for he too is a Galilean." When Peter denied this for the third time, a rooster crowed, just as foretold. (22:34) Jesus turned and looked at Peter, His gaze pierced him to the core. He recalled Jesus' prediction and what he said to Jesus just a few hours earlier, "Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death." (22:33) How would Peter feel the moment when he realised what he had done crashed down on him? He would never forget this moment when their eyes met. He was ashamed of his betrayal, and he went out and wept bitterly.

How could Peter, who was once so certain of his spiritual strength and loyalty, deny Jesus three times? And why did Jesus allow Peter to fail so miserably? Could it have been avoided? Jesus could have easily protected Peter and not allowed Satan to sift him (22:21), but He let Peter face this failure. The purpose is for Peter to realise that he was not as bold and courageous as he thought he was. Later on, as we seen in John 21, the resurrected Jesus had lovingly restored and strengthened Peter. This was

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so that he could strengthen his brothers. (22:32) God used Peter's failures to mould him from "Simon" to "Peter" – the Rock, where Jesus will build His church. (Mt 16:18)

We may have been stumbled over our own failures and weaknesses in this faith journey; it may be a painful journey, but take heart, Jesus' eyes are on us. His mercy and grace are always greater than our failures, and when we turn back to Him, He'll surely restore and strengthen us for His glory and purpose.

*Ps Guo Fen*

# The Daughters of Jerusalem

LUKE 23:26-32

These women knew Jesus. They loved Jesus. They saw Jesus suffering and they weiled for Him. Jesus in the midst of extreme pain said to them "Do not weep for me but weep for your children." Jesus then prophesized that tribulation will descend onto Jerusalem. That happened 30 years later, in the year A.D. 70 during the fall of Jerusalem. During that period, Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman army and the people were trapped. They suffered from hunger, plague and confusion arising from war. Some even killed their own children to satisfy their hunger. In the end, Jerusalem was burnt down and there were corpses everywhere. People shouted "Mountains, fall on us. Hills, cover us." Why? It was because it was better to die than to live.

Jesus knew. He certainly knew. The people died a terrible death before the end of this world and entered into eternal death after judgement. All these are the results of sin. Therefore, Jesus wanted to change this and followed God's will. Through His own suffering, Jesus wanted to rescue men from the suffering that they will certainly face in the future.

When Jesus was nailed on the cross, His eyes were on the final destiny of man. Hence, when we give up what we desire for Christ's sake and carry the cross, we need to remember God's reminder to "weep for ourselves and for our children". Look at our family members, look at our relatives, and look at our brothers and sisters. Let's continue to watch over them, for the sake of their salvation and to know Christ.

*Ps Steven*

# The Lonely Journey of the Cross

JOHN 19:16-27

The path to crucifixion at Golgotha was a painful process for Jesus. During this journey, Jesus fell to the ground due to the weight of the cross. When he reached Golgotha, the soldiers nailed his hands and feet onto the cross and had a notice fastened on it, which read "The King of the Jews". This is a huge mockery. Crucifixion was the cruellest form of punishment during that time. It was used on Jesus. It is hard to imagine Jesus as a suffering God. This suffering is not only physical, but also emotional as He was lonely after being sold, betrayed and abandoned.

In this world which values success and wealth, how do we see a suffering God? Sometimes, we suffer as well, just like Jesus. We need to carry the cross and face the storms of life. Will you follow a suffering Christ? Hebrews 4:15 talks about the weakness of Jesus. As a result of all the weaknesses He experienced, we can rely on Him, who understands our weaknesses, to face the future.

In the midst of His suffering, Jesus expressed His love for others. Even though Jesus could not control the external environment, he can without constrain, love and care for others. While he was bearing the sins of the world on His shoulders, He still found time to care for His mother and the people around Him. Similarly, when we are faced with many difficulties, we can believe that Jesus' love will be shared with those who follow Him.

*Ps Steven*

# Why have you forsaken me?

PS 22

Ps 22:1

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

One December night, the home of Ed and Nancy Huizenga was burnt to the ground while they were at church rehearsing for the annual Christmas concert. Just three months earlier, they had just taken in the children of Nancy's best friend, Barb Post, a widow who had died of cancer. So when Ed & Nancy's house burned to the ground just before Christmas, it was not just their home that they lost, it was the home of two teenagers who had already lost their mother and father. Why did God allow this? Where is God?

Have there been times in your life when you felt abandoned by God? When God was silent? Perhaps you were facing of an unexpected sickness, failure or disappointment. Ps 22 is a famous Messianic Psalm. It tells us what Jesus was thinking upon the Cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" "Roaring lions open their mouths wide against me. Dogs surround me. They have pierced my hands and my feet." Jesus is saying, "I'm dying for my lambs. This is what Jesus meant in John 10, when he said, He is the good shepherd. We are secured and no one can take us out of his hand. How? Because Jesus laid down his life!

As Spurgeon has noted that in Psalm 22 David "bewailed the woes of the Shepherd." while in the 23rd he "tunefully rehearses the joys of the flock." adding that "it is only after we have read, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' that we come to 'the Lord is my Shepherd.' " Unless we have known of the sufferings of the shepherd, we cannot fully appreciate the shepherd's care of the flock. Yet there is more, for after Ps 23 come Ps 24 which pictures Jesus coming as the glorious king. These 3

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images coincide with the 3 of the shepherd in the New Testament. He is the "Good Shepherd" of Ps 22 who laid down his life (John 10:1-16). He is the "Great Shepherd" of Ps 23 who walks besides us (Heb. 13:20). He is the "Chief Shepherd" of Ps 24 (1 Peter 5:4) who will come again as King.

On the following Saturday, the Huizengas went back to their house to sift through the ashes. They saw this piece of paper fluttering in the wind that somehow survived the fire. On it were these words: "Contentment: Realizing that God has already provided everything we need for our present happiness." To Nancy & Ed, It was assurance they needed that He was there... and He was not silent. Not abandoned. Not unloved.

*Ps Isaac*

# Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus

LUKE 23:33-56

The purpose of the Gospel of Luke is “so that his readers can have certainty of what has happened to Jesus and so know how to respond to him appropriately.” (Luke 1:1-5). True to form, Luke detailed how 4 distinct groups of people responded to the death of Jesus. The 4 groups are the thieves, the centurion, the women, and Joseph. They come from very different backgrounds with the first three sharing more in common than the last one.

The first three groups are outsiders as far as the Jews are concerned. The thieves must have committed murder in the course of robbery, since stealing does not merit capital punishment under the Law. They are the moral outcasts. The centurion is most likely a Samaritan. Not only is he an oppressor of the Jews, he is a gentile of the gentiles - the most hated race by the Jews. They represent the social and political outcasts. And then there are the women. Gender discrimination is rampant in the middle-east back then. They represent the gender outcasts.

Yet at the crucifixion of Jesus, it was these people who embraced Jesus. Not his disciples, nor the religious elite. Why?

In the gospel of Luke, in general, it is the outsiders, the women, the common people and the laity that get it before the insiders, the men, the elite and the clergy. Why would that be? We know that Jesus never takes somebody in just because they're poor or because they're suffering or because they're excluded.

What Luke is trying to tell us is that success (and power and accomplishment) in general brings a spiritual blindness. Jesus ushered in a kingdom where

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people are not saved by saying that I can live up to your standards but that I am too weak/sinful and I need a saviour to rescue me. Christianity is not an easy religion for the strong and the elite to embrace. But it is tailor-made for the poor in spirit.

And Joseph of Arimathea proves this is true. He is rich (look at his tomb). He is powerful (a member of the council). He is a religious elite (a member of the Sanhedrin). He does not fit in the former 3 groups of outcasts. But he shares one thing in common with them – they are all poor in spirit. They know they are not good enough. They know their need of God.

At the foot of the cross, how do you respond? Do you respond by saying I am serving you, I am praying hard, and so I am good enough? Or do you cling to the foot of Jesus and say “I need you. I need you this minute. I need you this hour. I need you this day.” May we all be in the latter tribe!

*Peter*

# The Resurrection of Christ

LUKE 24:1-31

"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." (24:2-3)

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph had witnessed Jesus' burial on Friday evening. They are sure of the location; there was no mistake about that. But when they arrived, the large stone blocking the door has been rolled away and the body is nowhere to be seen.

## He Has Risen (Luke 24:5b-6a)

Now the angels speak, "But the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!'" (24:5b-6a)

The angels ask a startling question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" They are in a tomb looking for a dead man. But a grave is no place to find the living Christ, the angels declare with some irony. A grave is the last place to you look when you are seeking Life. He Is Risen!

What are we as disciples to learn from this passage? Several things:

Jesus dies, is buried, and is raised from the dead in history, in real-time. This is not portrayed as a myth but as an historical event. Neither history nor science have a way to explain such a one-time occurrence.

The discovery of the empty tomb is not a case of mistaken identity, since the women were witnesses to Jesus' burial.

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The fact of the empty tomb and the presence of the grave clothes are attested by Peter and John before they are convinced that Jesus has actually been raised from the dead.

Jesus is not dead, He Is Risen! The historical fact of the resurrection is the foundation stone of the Christian faith. Apostle Paul declares the same truth: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

### **Prayer**

"Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that the resurrection is more than a comforting story, but an historical fact. Thank you that as Father and Son together You endured the immense distress and agony of coming in the flesh, living in the flesh in the midst of clueless mankind, dying in the flesh a criminal's, and being raised from the flesh to an immortal body. It is hard for me to grasp all this, but I believe it and am in awe. Thank you in the Holy Name of Jesus, my Risen Lord. Amen."

As we celebrate Resurrection Sunday, Let's proclaim and sing "Because He Lives, I can face tomorrow..." Hallelujah! Our God reigns!

*Po Elaine*



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