

**The Road To Easter**  
**Pt. 1 - Paving The Way**  
**Steve Ely**

I. Introduction

It is inevitable. I don't really know if the statement they make is true or if it is made merely as result of social pressure or endorsement dollars. What I do know is that they almost always say it. After the big win someone will thrust a camera in the star player's face and scream where are you going and their response is . . . "I'm going to Disneyland." Disneyland is the final destination. The pinnacle. The goal. The crown and the capstone. I have never heard anyone stop and detail the journey they take to get to that location. However, if you have ever taken the road trip to Disneyland then you know that there are some essential and no less meaningful stops along the way . . . Cadillac Ranch, The Vegas Strip, Hoover Dam, The Grand Canyon and many others. The final destination gets all the attention and focus, but the stops along the way are really what make the trip memorable. The same is true when it comes to Easter. As a believer Easter is our focus. It garners all of our attention and in many ways rightfully so. However, just like we do regarding vacation travels, we become so locked in on that final destination that we often overlook and fail to give the proper attention to the stops along the way that were essential and consequential not only in Jesus' life and journey but in ours. I think it is crucial for us to slow down on the way to Easter and walk the road Jesus took to get there. What leads to the empty tomb? What happened on the Tuesday or Thursday before He is raised from the dead? Do you know? Does it matter? Let's walk this road together and see as we head to the Disneyland of our faith . . . Easter!

Text: Matthew 21:1-11 (MSG), Luke 19:39-40 (NIV)

When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: "Go over to the village across from you. You'll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, say, 'The Master needs them!' He will send them with you." This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet:

Tell Zion's daughter, "Look, your king's on his way, poised and ready, mounted on a donkey, on a colt, foal of a pack animal."

The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, "Hosanna to David's son!" "Blessed is he who

comes in God's name!" "Hosanna in highest heaven!" As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, "What's going on here? Who is this?" The parade crowd answered, "This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee."

(39-40) Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

### **Sunday - Triumphal Entry**

On at least 3 occasions Jesus has already told the disciples about His impending death. After feeding the 5,000 - In Mark 8 . . . "The Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes; be killed; and be raised again." Again, in Mark 9, following the transfiguration Jesus says, "the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected." Then the third time in Mark 10, Jesus gets very precise when He states, "We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

I think it is important to know as we read about Jesus' approach to the city that He was aware of what was about to happen. In fact, in the coming days in the Garden, Jesus would even request that His Father, if possible, find another way. The coming pain, brutality, beating, stripping, spitting, agony of nailed hands, feet and separation from His Father were not a surprise to Jesus. The pressure and stress of all of this is on His mind as He enters the path down the steep slope of the Mount of Olives to approach Jerusalem as the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world. He takes this path so that He will enter Jerusalem through the Sheep Gate where the lambs used for the sacrifice of atonement were driven from Bethlehem where they were raised and prepared (do you see what He did there?) to become the ultimate and final sacrifice for man. It is necessary to know that He knew what was coming to understand the implications of this Sunday that we call Palm Sunday on the Road to Easter.

As we examine what happens on this special day in Jesus' life I must ask you a question. What would you do if you knew you were headed into the worst week of your life? What if you knew today that tomorrow you would be betrayed, lose friends, be rejected, mocked, lied about and ultimately killed on Friday? Would you mope? Would you run? Would you get depressed? Have a nervous breakdown? Drink until you are numb? Shop to ignore? Isolate and refuse to come out of the house or to answer your phone? I want you to notice what Jesus did! In light of facing the worst and final week of His life He allows a praise service to break out around Him!

I want you to see this truth. When the people begin to throw down their garments and throw down tree branches and shout Hosanna they are literally praising Jesus as the coming King. They are exalting Him and fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, Psalms 118, and Daniel chapter 9:24-25.

So, this impromptu praise service we call the Triumphal Entry not only fulfills prophecy, it repeats pattern. God established a pattern in Scripture that is repeated now by Jesus! In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise Him for the splendor of His holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for His love endures forever." Facing insurmountable odds. Facing superior forces. Facing an overwhelming tide. Jehoshaphat obeys God and a pattern is established that is now repeated on Palm Sunday - praise precedes battle! We worship our way into war so that we can worship our way out with the win!

How many of us are so intent on the prophecy of what is coming and the dread of what we are facing that we fail to operate on the pattern? So intent on following the prophecy of you are sick, you are broke, you have made too many mistakes, the chickens are coming home to roost, you made your own bed so that we now fail to follow the pattern as we enter the tough and painful moments of our life. The pattern is clear praise out front.

I want you to get this right because it may make the difference between defeat and victory. But I want to caution you that we must not follow the (SLIDES 23-24) pattern and praise out of obligation. Well, I will just praise because I am supposed to! I don't feel like it and don't want to participate, but I have to. No, these folks didn't praise out of obligation, they praised out of revelation. They have a sudden revelation that Jesus is the Son of God. The people have a revelation of who He is. The reason you must praise is because you know He is who He says He is. We praise because we have a revelation of His worth. We praise because we have a revelation of His identity. We praise because we have a revelation of Who is on our side! I will praise because I know His power. I know His track record. I will follow the pattern not because I have to, but because He alone is worthy of praise . . . when I feel like it and when I don't. My upcoming misery, my upcoming consequences, my current challenges have no bearing on His worth! Do you have a revelation of who is on the path with you today? If you do, then praise Him! I'm not praising God because I have been good to God! I am praising God because He has been so good to me! When I think about His goodness and what He has done for me I am not operating out of obligation. I am spinning, shouting, singing, bowing out of revelation.

I want you to notice that Luke informs us that it is the church folks who try to get Jesus to stop the worship service. The religious leaders try to stop the song. They try to pause the praise. They try to divert the attention from the divine. And that is exactly what the enemy still tries to do. Our enemy tries to silence praise because he knows it prepares us for what we are about to face.

This praise service prepares Jesus. It propels Jesus. It pronounces Jesus!

Psalms 3:7 - Praise shatters the jawbone of the enemy!

**Praise literally silences the one trying to silence us.** Our willingness and determination to praise, even in the light of coming trials and tribulations, tells the enemy to shut his mouth!

What is trying to silence your praise? What is trying to get you to hold your tongue? What is trying to get you to duck your head? I remind you that Joseph was thrown into a pit. His jealous brothers are thinking about killing him. But one of his brothers named Judah saves his life and convinces his brothers to sell him rather than killing him. Judah means praise. Praise stops the enemy's plan to kill him. Praise gets him out of pit. Praise positions him for his victory. Don't be silent. Don't keep quiet!

**Praise paves the way for The Way!** Praise is God's pavement. It is what God rides in on. He inhabits . . . sets up residence in . . . walks in . . . settles in our praise! Praises are the Lord's stomping grounds! Praise prepares the way of the Lord. We want to praise after victory. Jesus positions praise as pavement that will usher Him through pain and into also victory.

This day is so important on the Road to Easter because it teaches us that the pattern is worth repeating. It is in light of what you are about to face or what you are going through that you must decide what you are going to lay at His feet? Are you going to prepare the way for Him? Are you going to pave the way to deliverance with dance or a dirge? Are you going to pave the way for a miracle with a melody or with misery? Are you going to prepare the way for a change in your marriage with a chorus or a curse?

Want Jesus to ride in? Praise! Want Jesus to show up? Praise! Want Jesus to rescue? Praise!

On that Palm Sunday, the people symbolically paved the path with their garments and branches to signify that Jesus was royalty and that He was arriving as a King to override their bondage to the Romans. They kinged Him.

I want us to follow the pattern. What do you have symbolically that would represent what you are laying down so that Jesus can come in? A pill bottle? I need you to come in healing. A wedding ring? I need you to come into my relationship. A dollar? I need you to come in in provision. My phone? I need you to come into my schedule, my viewing habits,

my contact list. What do you need Him to override? Lay it at His feet this morning and praise Him in front of your victory. Lay these things at His feet and King Him today! Pave the way for Jesus to show up!

**The Road To Easter**  
**Pt. 2 - Turning Tables**  
**Steve Ely**

I. Introduction

Remember those family vacations you took as a kid? Loading the car. Hunkering down in the back seat as miles passed by. I would imagine that if you look back at pictures from those road trips you would probably see pictures from the final destination. The family on the beach. The family in the oversized rocking chair. The family at the campsite. It seems like the final destination always garnered all the attention and certainly the bulk of the photo ops. However, it little store, the tower we climbed up, the rattle snake pit I almost fell into that really what made the trip memorable. The same is true when it comes to Easter. As a believer Easter is our focus. It garners all of our attention and in many ways rightfully so. However, just like we do regarding vacation travels, we become so locked in on that final destination that we overlook and fail to give the proper attention to the stops along the way that were essential and consequential not only in Jesus' life and journey but in ours. I think it crucial for us to slow down on the way to Easter and walk the road Jesus took to get there. What leads to the empty tomb? What happened on the Tuesday or Thursday before He is raised from the dead? Do you know? Does it matter?

Last week, we covered the Sunday that we call Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphal entry. Now let's proceed to Monday on the Road to Easter.

**Monday - Cleanses The Temple**

Text: Matthew 21:12-17 (MSG)

Jesus went straight to the Temple and threw out everyone who had set up shop, buying and selling. He kicked over the tables of loan sharks and the stalls of dove merchants. He quoted this text: My house was designated a house of prayer; You have made it a hangout for thieves. Now there was room for the blind and crippled to get in. They came to Jesus and he healed them. When the religious leaders saw the outrageous things he was doing, and heard all the children running and shouting through the Temple, "Hosanna to David's Son!" they were up in arms and took him to task. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" Jesus said, "Yes, I hear them. And haven't you read in God's Word, 'From the mouths of children and babies I'll furnish a place of praise'?" Fed up, Jesus spun around and left the city for Bethany, where he spent the night.

On Monday, Jesus approaches His Father's House. It is interesting to me that He enters the Gentile Court. The inner areas of the temple were reserved for members of the people of Israel (men, women, priests). The Gentile Court is believed to have been large enough to

house 75,000 people. Since they were not Jewish, they were not allowed into the areas of the Temple that were nearest to God's presence. Instead, they were allowed access that was further away from God in the court of the Gentiles. There, they could learn God's Word and learn to worship God. Curiously, Jesus goes to the outcasts and marginalized, sees how they are being mistreated and He responds. (Perhaps that should remind us of who how we should view people.) Jesus finds that the priests had turned this Gentile Court into a shopping mall. The money changers were needed because foreign currency was not allowed to be put into the temple treasury. Every man was required to pay a half shekel, as per the command given to Moses in Exodus 30. Many of the coins in circulation would be Roman. So, the money changers were needed to make the exchange. The chief priests had the money changers charge an inflated fee to exchange foreign currency. Historians believe the priests took in what equated to about \$300,000 by this practice. On top of that, the priests were also scamming the people because if someone brought an animal in from the outside for sacrifice, then they would intentionally find something wrong with it so that the person would have to purchase one from one of the merchants at 30 times the price of the animals outside.

Jesus sees that the priests are taking advantage of the people and that the priests were literally becoming a barrier to keep people from worship (It would be like trying to hold a church service on the Midway at the State Fair). There isn't any room for the sick and lame in the house of God. So, Jesus cleans house. Jesus turns tables over. He challenged the entire banking system of Jerusalem.

This account of Jesus' Monday activities is mentioned and detailed in Matthew, Mark and Luke. However, John doesn't mention this account leading up to Jesus' death. He actually talks about an instance at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in John 2 immediately following the first miracle Jesus performs - turning water into wine. It is an eerily similar, but most historians believe, separate account.

John 2:13-17 (MSG)

When the Passover Feast, celebrated each spring by the Jews, was about to take place, Jesus traveled up to Jerusalem. He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength. Jesus put together a whip out of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, "Get your things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a shopping mall!" That's when his disciples remembered the Scripture, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

Jesus had already cleaned out this place of worship once. He begins and ends His ministry . . . literally bookends . . . by cleaning out, removing and displacing these blockades to worship. I simply mention John's account to ask you a question. **What has Jesus already removed from your life that you have allowed the enemy, others or by your own hand to be reestablished and rerooted?** If He removed it, then shouldn't the assumption be that He doesn't want that in your life now or ever again! Could it be that we need to allow Jesus to revisit the temple of our hearts and minds to forcefully remove some things once again? He removed doubt. He removed anxiety and worry. He uprooted pride. He dislodged anger. He kicked out the negative. He threw out grudges. He chased pornography out. He tossed greed out. Are those things back? I know in my own life I have to allow Him repeated entrance to keep me cleaned out! I need Him to constantly turn over tables in my heart, my mind, my life so that I am a pure temple of worship.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

How clean is our temple? What needs to be driven out? What have we allowed to set up shop that the presence of Jesus wants to throw out? What is doing normal day to day business in our lives that Jesus wants to forcefully expel? We must allow Jesus to cleanse us. **Repentance must be practiced! Repentance must be repeated! Repentance must become routine!**

The second thing I want you to notice is what Matthew says happens after the tables have been turned.

Children are running through the temple. To say this aggravates the religious is an understatement. Jesus responds to their complaint by saying, "from the mouths of babes and infants you have perfected praise." Could it be that perfected praise is only possible when what should have been removed from our lives and has been allowed to reestablish itself is once again removed? **Perfect praise comes from a clean place!** It isn't that Jesus won't receive praise from messed up folks. I am thankful that I don't have to be perfect to get to Him. He let a prostitute worship Him by pouring oil over His feet. However, like children and infants, our praise is perfected when we can approach Him with a clean heart and with clean hands! When we allow Jesus to clean us up and then we do our dead level best to remain clean our praise is perfected! Nothing blocking us. No grievances. No barriers. No interference. Just freedom to run into His presence and praise!



Matthew 5:8 - "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Did you hear it? The pure in heart see God. Open access! The reason that Jesus cleans us out and wants us to stay clean is so that we have unencumbered access to the Father! So, that we can boldly approach the throne! No guilt. No shame. No worry. Access!

Then the sick and lame make their way from the Court of the Gentiles or likely the Court of Women, through the Beautiful Gate, and go into the temple, i.e. the inner court (Court of Israelites) to be healed by Jesus.

The healing of the lame in Acts 3 gives us a picture of what it looked like for a disabled person to enter the temple. He was laid daily at Beautiful Gate "to ask alms from those who entered the temple". This gives us an idea that the Beautiful Gate is the furthest a blind/sick/lame person could go. It was only when he was healed that he entered into the temple with Peter and John as Acts 3:8 reports.

The scene is different in Matthew 21:14. The blind and lame entered into the temple, to come to Jesus. And there, He healed them. In the minds of the religious leaders, the temple has been defiled by the entrance of those who did not have the right to enter it.

I am thankful that changed through Jesus. In Galatians 3:28 we are put on notice that His death on the cross is for the purification and inclusion for all who come to Him. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female". That isn't about being politically correct or radical agendas that is about our status spiritually due to Christ's supreme sacrifice. According to Ephesians 2:14 Jesus has "broken down the middle wall of separation"

The blind and lame, though excluded, are healed and restored as the people of God. Now they find their place in His presence and worship. Jesus makes it possible for the sick and lame, discouraged and marginalized, forsaken and overlooked, rejected and despised to enter . . . shouldn't we?

How many of us get saved and then become barriers to others getting to Jesus? (SLIDES 33-34) Are we doors or have we become table monitors? We are now priests . . . a royal priesthood. Freely we have received, but now are we trying to allow only the right people, by our standards, into His presence? Jesus, on the road to Easter, throws the door open to the sick, lame and young to join Him in the presence of God. We must ask ourselves the hard question today are we more like the priest or more like Jesus? Are those of us who have experienced grace gracious? Are those of us who have been rescued really trying to rescue?

Are we trying to get those who need Jesus the most to Him or are we trying to keep them away from Him?

"What if the ugliness of our way is keeping the world from seeing the beauty of our truth? What if people's hearts are not open to hearing our thoughts on truth and life because we've failed to show them the beauty of The Way of Jesus?" Jay Pike

The tables have been turned over. The doors have been opened and we should be going into the highway and hedges to invite people to come into real life. To find hope. To find healing. To find life! Let's throw the doors open and let people into our lives and into our church so that those who sincerely need an encounter with Jesus have access!

Announce Blackwells and Pray Over them.

**The Road To Easter**  
**Pt. 3 - Heads Up**  
**Steve Ely**

I. Introduction

It becomes the question that every parent loathes. It is the question that grates on your very last nerve. From the back seat, battling for every inch of real estate with your seat hogging sibling, when seconds feel like days and hours feel like centuries a constant cry would ring out . . . Are we there yet? Games are invented to mask the passing miles. Tape lines are placed on vinyl seats to mark off borders. Threats of "Don't make me come back there!" are uttered at varying levels of intensity. I wonder how many really cool moments we missed simply because we couldn't stop in the mad dash to get to the final destination long enough to pay attention to the ongoing journey? I wonder how many memorable sights were overlooked because we were so focused on the final destination that we became weary of the journey that was required to get there?

Jesus' journey to Easter is often overlooked. The destination holds so much meaning and hope for us that if we aren't careful we don't slow down long enough to understand how He got there. We are attempting to pause and reflect on the road Jesus took to get to the empty tomb. What happened on the Tuesday or Thursday before He is raised from the dead? Do you know? Does it matter? Let's walk this road together and see as we head to the Disneyland of our faith . . . Easter!

**We have reviewed Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry. Last week we talked about Jesus' Monday when He cleansed the temple.**

Now Jesus, after spending the night again with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, returns to the temple. On the way, He curses a fig tree because it promised sustenance and looked healthy but produced no fruit (Word - Jesus does more than just inspect fruit. He expects fruit when we are in an environment that is conducive to fruit production). He then goes to the Temple. He is confronted by the religious leaders and spends a large chunk of time telling parable after parable to highlight, expose and clearly call out their rejection of the Messiah. He finally calls them vipers and makes His way to the Mount of Olives and sits down. He begins talking to His disciples and something interesting takes place here. SEP

**Tuesday - Hands Out Hope**

Text: Luke 21:8-19, 25-28. 34-36 (MSG)

He said, "Watch out for the doomsday deceivers. Many leaders are going to show up with forged identities claiming, 'I'm the One,' or, 'The end is near.' Don't fall for any of that. When you hear of wars and uprisings, keep your head and don't panic. This is routine history and

no sign of the end.” He went on, “Nation will fight nation and ruler fight ruler, over and over. Huge earthquakes will occur in various places. There will be famines. You’ll think at times that the very sky is falling. “But before any of this happens, they’ll arrest you, hunt you down, and drag you to court and jail. It will go from bad to worse, dog-eat-dog, everyone at your throat because you carry my name. You’ll end up on the witness stand, called to testify. Make up your mind right now not to worry about it. I’ll give you the words and wisdom that will reduce all your accusers to stammers and stutters.

“You’ll even be turned in by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends. Some of you will be killed. There’s no telling who will hate you because of me. Even so, every detail of your body and soul—even the hairs of your head is in my care; nothing of you will be lost. Staying with it—that’s what is required. Stay with it to the end. You won’t be sorry; you’ll be saved.

Vs. 25-28 - It will seem like all hell has broken loose—sun, moon, stars, earth, sea, in an uproar and everyone all over the world in a panic, the wind knocked out of them by the threat of doom, the powers-that-be quaking. “And then—then!—they’ll see the Son of Man welcomed in grand style—a glorious welcome! When all this starts to happen, up on your feet. Stand tall with your heads high. Help is on the way!”

(NIV) When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Vs. 34-36 - But be on your guard. Don’t let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping. Otherwise, that Day is going to take you by complete surprise, spring on you suddenly like a trap, for it’s going to come on everyone, everywhere, at once. So, whatever you do, don’t fall asleep at the wheel. Pray constantly that you will have the strength and wits to make it through everything that’s coming and end up on your feet before the Son of Man.”

Tuesday is an odd day on the Road to Easter. No parades. No outbursts of anger. No table throwing in the Temple. Jesus curses a tree. He curses religious leaders. Then He retreats to the mountain side and has a conversation with His followers. I want you to remember Jesus is now 48 hours away from being betrayed by one of His closest followers. He is now 48 hours away from agonizing in prayer until he sweats blood asking His Father for another way. He is now 48 hours away from being arrested and having false accusations hurled at Him in front of the High Priests. He is 48 hours away from Peter denying Him. And in the face of all of that. Knowing what He was facing. Facing His worst days. Facing separation from His closest friends. Facing separation from His beloved mother. Facing separation and even rejection from His heavenly Father. Facing His worst days and a switch takes place. In light of all that He is about to face, Jesus switches focus and looks ahead to our

worst days. He describes what our worst days will look like and what they will feel like. Nation fighting nation. Ruler fighting ruler. Earthquakes. Men falling down dead. Famines. Betrayal. Powers that be shaken. The threat of doom. Panic. Men will lose heart. Believers persecuted. Hunted down for their belief. Imprisoned for their faith. Turned in and on by family. Ridiculed for faith. All hell breaking loose. Our worst days! Our current days!

And then He says, "When you see all of these things" look up! Get your head up. Perspective matters. Focus matters. Your gaze matters. Jesus teaches us that we must keep our eyes and our heads up. He warns us that in the middle of all of this we must (Luke 21:34) be careful or our hearts will be weighed down. (SLIDES 27-28) He tells us that if our head goes down, then our hope runs out!

He teaches us that heavy hearts are resolved by lifted heads.

He teaches us that the path to the cross has to be a journey through the cross.

The disciples wanted help, but Jesus leads them to hope and in the process . . .

### **Jesus teaches us that we are no help if we don't have hope!**

If you are consumed and worried about what is happening around you, then you won't be able to point anyone to hope. If all you can do in an effort to not be overcome is to be distracted by shopping, drinking, partying then you can't help because you have taken eyes off of hope! So, Jesus tells us that we can't "let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled!"

Are we to help people here? Yes, but we must also have hope beyond here! Why? Jesus knew that help runs out. I can give you financial assistance, but the money will run out again. I can promise you healing, but healing gives away to other ailments. I can promise you a resurrected life, but the resurrected find their way back into a tomb eventually. So, rather than only giving us help in the middle of dire days, He gives us hope! The help I can give you will run out, but I can't let my hope run out. Our greatest asset and the greatest gift that we have to offer is hope!

We used to be surrounded by people that were so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. "I'll Fly Away" became their escape anthem so that they didn't have to deal with the nasty now. However, Jesus knew that this day would come! The day we live in is the day in which the pendulum has swung too far the other way until we look around and those with THE GREATEST promise seem to have ducked their heads. Those who should have the highest hope are now overcome by the outlook and forecast of the broadcast news. We have come to talk like there is no way out. Destruction is around every turn! Sickness is rampant. Division is rampant. Destruction is daily! Disillusionment and disappointment are

the daily dose. But it is time to remember that our worst day only gives birth to our best day!  
The darker it gets the closer His return gets!

Jesus looks beyond the cross and even beyond what we fixate on which is Easter and His resurrection and He says, "lift your hearts" and "lift your heads" and remember that our hope is fixed on His return.

Our hope isn't fixed on Joe Biden. Our hope isn't fixed on Donald Trump. Our hope isn't fixed on a political or economic system. Our hope isn't fixed on America. Our hope isn't fixed on our constitution. Am I thankful for it? Will I fight for it? Yes, but my hope isn't fixed on it. Our hope isn't fixed on Israel. Our hope isn't fixed on man's remedies. Why? If you attach your hope to those things, then your head will go down. Your heart will go down. You will be unable to provide anyone any help or hope!

Our hope must be firmly fixed and our gaze must be securely fastened to the heavens above for the day when our King will return with healing in His wings and power in His hands. Worry is a symptom of no hope! Anxiety is a symptom of lack of awareness of His approach. He is coming! He is coming! He is coming! Look up. Get your head up. Get your heart up. Get your eyes up. Get your hands up! Get your hope up! This isn't the end. It is the beginning! Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled! If we need an old song to sing, then let's sing this one . . .

What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms?  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms!

He is near! Get your head up! Get your heart up! Get your hope back!

Psalms 24:9 - Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Psalms 42:11 - Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God—soon I'll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He's my God.

Yes, the days may seem dark. Yes, the ground beneath us is shifting sand. Yes, folks have lost their minds. But the real question and the real issue today is have you lost your hope? Without hope you can't help!

**The Road To Easter**  
**Pt. 4 - Breaking Bread Before It Breaks Bad**  
**Steve Ely**

Introduction

Destination disease. It is deadly. It is contagious. It is the inability to enjoy, learn from or live in the moment long enough to pay attention to the now because we are focused on then! The drive to next causes us to miss memories. It causes us to miss opportunities. It causes us to miss moments that we should learn from and gain wisdom. We are so focused on the final destination that we refuse to slow down and learn.

Jesus' journey to Easter is our focus. The destination holds so much meaning and hope for us that if we aren't careful our drive for that day causes us to miss important moments along the way. We are attempting to pause and reflect on the road Jesus took to get to the empty tomb. What happened on the Tuesday or Thursday before He is raised from the dead? Do you know? Does it matter? Let's walk this road together and see as we head to the Disneyland of our faith . . . Easter!

**We have reviewed Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry. We talked about Jesus' Monday when He cleansed the temple. Last week, we discussed Tuesday. It was the day Jesus handed out hope.**

Now if you have your Road to Easter Card, then you will realize that Wednesday is missing. The reason that is the case is that we know practically nothing about Wednesday. Little is recorded. A woman anoints Jesus' feet. Judas meets with the Chief Priests and agrees to betray Jesus. Other than those events there isn't much known. So, the only thing I can tell you is even Jesus pauses. Jesus, knowing the hardest days are about to begin, disappears from the public stage. Maybe with no details we need to learn that our ability to handle the public stage is established in the private days. Some of you just need to take a day and refresh, renew, strengthen for the days to come.

Then comes Thursday. Thursday is the beginning of a brutal two days. It is chock full of events. It is long. It is grueling. It is eventful.

It is on this day that Jesus will wash His disciples' feet. It is on this day that Jesus prays in the Garden in agony, despair and with such intensity that His sweat becomes blood. It is on this day that Judas kisses Jesus' cheek to identify Him to the Romans. It is on this day that Jesus is arrested. It is on this day that Jesus heals the Roman guard's severed ear. It is on this day that Peter will follow at a distance and ultimately deny Christ. It is on Thursday that Jesus is brought before Caiaphas, the High Priest, where the whole religious council had gathered to begin making their case against Jesus. He is accused of blasphemy. He is spit

on. He slapped. He is struck in the face with fists. It was an incredibly difficult day. We could spend weeks examining this day alone.

However, let's back up, slow down and also realize that there was an important event that is positioned at the beginning of all that will take place on this painful day. We call it the Last Supper.

### **Thursday - Communes**

Text: Luke 22:14-20 (MSG)

When it was time, he sat down, all the apostles with him, and said, "You've no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this Passover meal with you before I enter my time of suffering. It's the last one I'll eat until we all eat it together in the kingdom of God." Taking the cup, he blessed it, then said, "Take this and pass it among you. As for me, I'll not drink wine again until the kingdom of God arrives." Taking bread, he blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, given for you. Eat it in my memory."

He did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant written in my blood, blood poured out for you.

VS. 15 - (WEY) He said to them, "Earnestly have I longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

(LET) And He said to them, Upon passionate longing I have passionately longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

(KJV) With fervent desire I longed to eat.

This moment, that has captured the minds of artists and the hearts of Christians for centuries, takes place before everything else on this hectic and heartbreaking day. However, if you read verse 15 slowly, then we discover that this wasn't as much about the meal as much as it was about the men Jesus ate the meal with. There is a deep, fervent desire, longing, and passion inside of Jesus to spend some quality time with His closest friends, followers, confidants right before everything becomes unbearable!

I think we miss that aspect of the account. Jesus is literally letting us see that in this moment that He needed His men as badly as they needed Him.

I think it is crucial to pay attention to the order established by Jesus. He makes this statement . . . You have no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this Passover meal with you before I enter my time of suffering.



Earnestly have I longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

### **Communion prepared Jesus for suffering!**

**Jesus wanted to commune with His disciples before He suffered. We tend to wait to commune after suffering.** <sup>[SEP]</sup> **Jesus positions communion before the cross!** Why do we continue to position communion after we go to a cross?

I think we missed it. Jesus gives us the secret sauce for being able to survive indescribable suffering! It is our time together that strengthens us to survive suffering!

Notice that before they spend the evening together Jesus sends his disciples ahead to prepare for communion. A lot of times we act like we don't have to prepare for communion. We just expect it to happen, and then we are frustrated when it doesn't. **Communion requires preparation.** The disciples prepare by securing a room and food. We too must prepare for and be intentional about communing. However, our preparation isn't about prepping a room or ordering the right appetizer. Our preparation is about how we approach our time together. We can't operate in isolation and then expect to enjoy the fruit and benefits of intimacy. We can't just roll in here and expect intimacy. We must prepare. We must prepare our hearts. We must prepare our spirits. We must prepare our souls. We must remove walls and let guards down. We must prepare to allow others in. If we had prepared for communion by setting at the table before the pain, then we would be prepared to endure the pain. If we don't commune before we suffer, then there typically isn't anyone to commune with after we suffer. There seems to be a pattern that Jesus is trying to establish, but for some reason we have established our own pattern. Jesus communes before. We inform after. We wait and then we wallow. Jesus knew that suffering could only be survived if He communed before the suffering began.

When we think about Jesus' suffering, we think whips, fists, thorns, nails and spears. Perhaps a greater part of the suffering that Jesus knew He was about to face was separation. Perhaps this is why Paul later chooses to examine the power of Jesus' love for us by exclaiming that His love is a greater power than the power of separation! He says nothing can separate us and then lists incredibly powerful forces that have been stripped of their capacity to overtake Jesus' love for us. Perhaps the power of separation is broken by Jesus' love when we commune with one another!

The investment of time you make in relationships when things are good will determine the withdrawal you can make when things are bad.

### **Communion is critical for courage.**

Jesus apparently knew that communion makes us stronger. We can face more together than we can alone. Haven't you experienced this when you were lifting weights or working out? You are struggling to do one more rep until someone comes along and says "Come on just one more. You can do it!" Or they put their hands just under the bar and somehow you have the ability to lift the weight one more time. Communion makes you stronger! Jesus' ability to endure the rest of this day and the day to come is birthed in communion. This is why Scripture tells us not to forsake gathering together (Hebrews). That isn't so we can just have church services together. That isn't about just going through a program or religious routine. That is about the fact that when we gather together we gather courage! Your pain threshold could be determined/contingent on your willingness to commune with others. We are weakest when we are alone. We are strongest when we commune with one another. Jesus even says that as we spend this time together that we "re"member the body. It is as we come together that we find strength in numbers.

I will remind you that on Friday, Jesus couldn't even carry His cross by Himself. Why do we think we can carry ours all by ourselves? We need to commune with one another before we suffer so that we will have individuals who rally around us when we buckle under the weight of what we are carrying! It is communion that gives way to carrying one another's burdens! Through communion a covenant of care is established. If no one rallies, then could it be that this is the result of not breaking bread before it broke bad? No relationship but we want to be rescued. Rescue comes with relationship!

### **Communion is critical for compassion!**

Notice that immediately following communion compassion is birthed. Jesus washes His disciples' feet. He serves them. How do you have the strength to serve folks that will walk away from you? Betray you? Forsake you? Deny you? You commune with them and learn to love them enough to offer them grace! Then Jesus' compassion carries outside the walls of that room and He heals the severed ear of someone who is an enemy. How do you have the strength to heal someone who is trying to lead you to undeserved pain? You commune with folks who are for you so that you are so full of compassion that you are able to bless those who will spitefully use you! Jesus' actions out of a time of communion reveal that the true test of our faith isn't loving Jesus. He is easy to love. He dies for us. The true test is loving Judas. He is trying to get you killed. Communion with one another is where we find enough strength so that we can love those who hurt us intentionally. When I am with you and commune with you, I become more compassionate. If I remain in isolation, then I inevitably become self-centered and self-serving!

### **Communion leads to conquering!**

We know that no one quits alone. Jesus also knew that no one wins alone. He knew that He needed these men to continue after He was gone. He knew that to win He would need them. My win not only depends on Him . . . my win depends on we! Your win depends on me. Isolation leads to annihilation. Communion leads to conquering.

We always take communion and remember Jesus' death and we should. However, today I want us to take communion together not only to remember Him but to also celebrate our communion with one another through Him!

**The Road To Easter**  
**Pt. 5 - Memory Lane**  
**Steve Ely**

I. Introduction

We are almost there. One more exit and we arrive. We just need to taxi to the gate. Anticipation is coursing through our veins. We lean forward, we gather our belongings, we prepare to jump up and exit the plane. We can't wait to unbuckle the seat belt and bail out of the plane/car even before it stops. The last few miles and last few minutes seem to take the longest. We long for the final destination. But in this journey we can't afford to miss the stops along the way. Jesus' journey to Easter is our focus. The destination holds so much meaning and hope for us that if we aren't careful our drive for that day causes us to miss important moments along the way. We are attempting to pause and reflect on the road Jesus took to get to the empty tomb. What happened on the Tuesday or Thursday before He is raised from the dead? Do you know? Does it matter? Let's walk this road together and see as we head to the Disneyland of our faith . . . Easter!

**We have reviewed Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry. We talked about Jesus' Monday when He cleansed the temple. We discussed Tuesday. It was the day Jesus hands out hope. On Wednesday we don't really know. On Thursday, He communes with His loved ones.**

It is now Friday. Jesus has dreaded this moment. He prays and asks His Father for a different way. His body, so repulsed by what He is about to endure, bursts until His sweat is blood. His prayer time produces a man so bloody and disfigured that He is almost unrecognizable. Fulfilling Isaiah 54:12 which says, "His appearance was beyond recognition as being a man." Judas' betrayal is complete. Delivered with a kiss. Peter has denied Christ. Fake trials have been held. Repeated opportunities for the religious to wake up and recognize Jesus as The Son of God have been tossed aside. A common and convicted criminal by the name of Barabbas is chosen. Jesus is crowned with thorns. Healing stripes have been viciously applied to His back. The heavy crossbeam of His cross has been carried. And all before 9am. We call it "Good Friday!"

Here is what happens:

4:00 to 6:00a.m. - Jesus' trial before Annas and Caiaphas.

6:00 to 8:00a.m. - Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate and Herod. Jesus appears before Pilate, is sent over to Herod, and then back to Pilate where he is sentenced to be crucified.

8:00 to 8:30a.m. - Jesus carries his cross, with Simon of Cyrene's help, to Golgotha.

9:00a.m. - Jesus is crucified.

9:00 to 9:30a.m. - The soldiers divide Jesus' clothing. He prays for them.

9:30 to 11:00a.m. - The soldiers watch over the crucifixion and mock Jesus: "He can't save himself. Come down from there, Son of God."

11:00a.m. to Noon - Jesus speaks from the cross to the thieves on either side. And to his mother, Mary, and to John, Jesus says, "Woman, here is your son. . . . John, here is your mother."

Noon - A three-hour darkness descends upon the land.

Noon to 3:00p.m. - The earth quakes, the temple curtain is torn, and Jesus thirsts but refuses to drink the wine mixed with gall. This would have numbed His senses. A pain killer. He chooses to feel the full effect of what we feel.

3:00p.m. - Jesus dies: "At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'" "Jesus said, 'It is finished,' and he gave up his spirit."

Good Friday. Good for who? Us? Without a doubt. Good for Jesus? Not even close! Friday is terrible and beautiful at the same time.

On Friday, you would think we would write down on our card the word - crucified. It is the highlight of the day. It is the highlight of history. It is this singular act of complete and total submission and surrender that is accepted by the Father as the sacrifice for every sin committed or that would be committed including ours. It is His cross that makes it possible for us to find life. If it wasn't for Friday there would be no hope for Sunday. There is not and cannot be a bloodless Gospel. It has been written that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins."

What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. I am responsible for His cross. I am thankful for the cross. I am humbled by His cross. It was His blood shed on the cross that causes the veil of separation to be torn so that I can have access to the Father! Separation is separated.

However, we are slowing down and trying to examine the scenes, moments and sights that are often overlooked. I don't want us to rush past the fact that Jesus dies, but I do want us to examine a moment while He is dying that has implications for us.

**Friday - Remembers**

Text: Luke 23:39-43 (MSG)

One of the criminals hanging alongside cursed him: "Some Messiah you are! Save yourself! Save us!" But the other one made him shut up: "Have you no fear of God? You're getting the same as him. We deserve this, but not him—he did nothing to deserve this."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom." He said, "Don't worry, I will. Today you will join me in paradise."

Two hours into crucifixion and in unfathomable pain. Each breath increasingly more difficult to take. Strength failing. 60 minutes of life left. Final rejection weighing down His soul. Sins of the world being carried and felt. And He remembers. I don't like the fact that He remembers this guy. A criminal. A nobody. A sinner. No chance to act like a Christian. No way to make amends. No way to right his wrongs. I want to view this scene and yell, "Don't waste your breath on him Jesus. Surely with the little energy you have left you could share some incredibly profound, life altering, destiny altering words." And He does! I submit to you that when Jesus struggles to form the words "Don't worry, I will" that He is making one of His most profound statements from the cross and to us.

**Jesus' ability to remember needs to be remembered.**

He hasn't forgotten you. We should be forgotten. We did this to ourselves. We made the choices. In the middle of our most painful moment. We should be forgotten we can't do anything to right this, fix this, correct this. But He remembers us. In the middle of what may feel like torture. Suffering consequences of our own mistake. He remembers us. In the middle of what may feel like your last breath. He remembers you. Even when you can't muster up any strength. When you can't serve. When you can't lift a finger. When you can't do any work towards a solution. Can't worship. He remembers you. When you think you are too far gone and can't make it right. He remembers you!

**Crucifixion lifts the burden of our sin. His ability to remember us lifts the burden of perfection.**

His ability to remember us lifts the crushing weight of earning righteousness. His ability to remember helps us to remember that salvation is not obtained by works lest any man should boast. His ability to remember shakes loose the chains of living up to a level of goodness to get His attention and His acceptance. This simple statement . . . "He remembers us" is the death of effort. The death of works. The death of earning it. Jesus remembers a criminal that could do nothing to be saved except believe.

The good news of the cross is not just that He saves us. The good news of the cross that we need to slow down long enough to celebrate is His ability to see us! I think so many, perhaps too many of us, who have viewed crucifixion so many times only focus on His

salvation and we fail to remember His memory! HE REMEMBERS US! Rest easy today. He remembers you. Rest in His ability to remember.

You may ask why knowing about His ability to remember us is so important? I want you to notice one other thing from this scene.

Jesus doesn't rescue this man. He doesn't miraculously intervene so that this man is pulled off of the cross by a legion of angels. He could have. One word would have done the job. One nod of His thorn crowned head and angels would have swooped in and broken the nails that held the criminal to the cross like toothpicks. But that doesn't happen and because it doesn't there is a truth we don't like but we need to know. **Even if we aren't rescued, we are remembered!** We need to know this because when we embrace this truth we discover that we can endure the cross of consequences. We can endure the cross of sickness. We can endure the cross of suffering because we know that the King of Kings remembers us. We need to remember that He remembers. He sees us. He is with us. The criminal makes a simple request . . . "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Notice, he addresses Jesus as Lord. This is why we talk about accepting Christ as more than a savior. We must make Him Lord. It is only those who submit to Him as Lord who are able to hang on regardless of rescue. It is when we make Him Lord that we can rest in His assurances and promises! Those who only know Him as savior will become angry when He chooses not to rescue. Those who know Him as Lord surrender to His memory being enough. When He is recognized as Lord we learn to submit to His choices over our preferences!

"Lord." It was the thief. His face swollen, his eyes dark and vision blurred, every breath a struggle. Certainly, these would be among the last words the thief would be able to utter. The tone in his voice was different. "I ask one thing of you, Lord. Is it possible, in that moment of your triumph, when you enter into your kingdom, is it possible that You might . . . remember me?"

It isn't recorded like this but I can hear Jesus' response. "Remember you?" "How can I possibly forget you. You are the first of my salvation. You are my first conquest over death. You, above all others, are the first evidence of my redemption. How can I forget you?"

"Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom." He said, "Don't worry, I will." This exchange gives us a glimpse into the ultimate depth of grace.

Jesus cannot and will not forget you. He gave His life for you! He is mind full of you at every moment. He is constantly praying for you! Remember you? How could He possibly forget you? He did what He did on Friday. He endured what He did on Friday for you! Rest in His

ability to remember. Some of you who have trusted His blood need to learn to trust His memory!



**The Road To Easter**  
**Pt. 6 - Silent Saturdays!**  
**Steve Ely**

I. Introduction

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” — Søren Kierkegaard.

Isn't that true? It is as we reflect that we understand. It is in the mad dash that keeps us from always understanding. We seldom reflect as we journey. It is only after we have arrived. That is true of most vacation trips. The anticipation of arrival is what consumes our thoughts. It isn't until we get back home and have time to reflect that we often find that the journey to the final destination was as much fun or more memorable than the actual destination we strived to reach.

Easter can be that way too. Jesus' journey to Easter is our focus. The destination holds so much meaning and hope for us that if we aren't careful our drive for that day causes us to miss important moments along the way. We are attempting to pause and reflect on the road Jesus took to get to the empty tomb. What happened on the Tuesday or Thursday before He is raised from the dead? Do you know? Does it matter? Let's walk this road together and see as we head to the Disneyland of our faith . . . Easter!

**We have reviewed Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry. We talked about Jesus' Monday when He cleansed the temple. On Tuesday Jesus hands out hope. On Thursday Jesus communes with His closest friends. On Friday, He remembers!**

**We need to record that on Saturday, Jesus doesn't rest!** He deserves a rest.

Crucifixion is complete. Friday comes to a close. Saturday or the Jewish Sabbath is about to begin. This would be a good time to take a break. Jesus has earned it.

Text: Matthew 27:57-66, 28:1-6 (MSG)

Late in the afternoon (Friday Evening) a wealthy man from Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, arrived. His name was Joseph. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate granted his request. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in clean linens, put it in his own tomb, a new tomb only recently cut into the rock, and rolled a large stone across the entrance. Then he went off. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary stayed, sitting in plain view of the tomb. After sundown, the high priests and Pharisees arranged a meeting with Pilate. They said, “Sir, we just remembered that that liar announced while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will be raised.’ We've got to get that tomb sealed until the third day. There's a good chance his disciples will come and steal the corpse and then go around saying, ‘He's risen from the dead.’ Then we'll be worse off than before, the final deceit surpassing the first.”

Pilate told them, "You will have a guard. Go ahead and secure it the best you can." So they went out and secured the tomb, sealing the stone and posting guards.

After the Sabbath (Sunday Morning), as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garments shimmered snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened, they couldn't move. The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.

Wait a minute. There is a noticeable gap in the text. The record is clear about what happens on Friday evening and then what takes place on Sunday morning. But what happened to Saturday?

On Friday, the body of Jesus is placed in the tomb. Spices are placed in the tomb. A stone is secured in front of the tomb. Guards are placed for fear of fraud. Sunday, Jesus rises from the dead and our faith is separated from every other religion! But what about Saturday. A day off? I mean Thursday was grueling. Friday was gruesome. Now nothing is said. Jesus surely needed to rest. To recover. He has earned it. He deserves it. And so Saturday is quiet. The only sound we can hear is the sound of family mourning the loss of a son. The only sounds are whispers of confused followers wondering if they should have remained fishermen. The only sound is religious leaders breathing a sigh of relief that this drama causing, system shaking, Messiah wanna be, crazy man has been silenced permanently. It is quiet. Or is it?

Very little detail is given about Saturday. Only glimpses in other passages. But for all of its silence don't mistake Saturday as unimportant or irrelevant. Easter discussions tend to skip this day. Friday and Sunday get the front page. The crucifixion and resurrection command our thoughts. But don't ignore Saturday. It would be easy to do so because . . .

We know so little. Jesus states to the thief that He will be in paradise. Some say that Jesus went to Hades to rescue saints that died before Jesus' crucifixion. Some point to Revelation 1:18 and determine that Jesus travels to hell and strips the devil of the keys of death, hell and the grave. The truth is I don't know. What I know is that this quiet day turns out to be anything but a day of rest for Jesus. He goes to work. The difference between this day and all the other days is that on all of the other days His works are in plain sight. On all the other days we have a front row seat. On all the other days His handiwork is obvious. But now,

hidden in a tomb, behind a stone, behind closed doors, out of sight we can't see Him work. And therein lies the truth of Saturday.

**Jesus is working when you can't see Him.**

Silent doesn't equal stopped. Silent doesn't mean quiet. Out of sight doesn't mean out of action. Shut in doesn't mean shut out.

What is over to us is the arena in which Jesus works His best.

Ladies are mourning Jesus is moving/mounting an attack.

Disciples are discouraged Jesus is dismantling death and darkness.

**His silence is not His absence,**

His presumed inactivity is never apathy. He was quiet but He didn't quit! Saturdays let us feel the full force of God's strength.

How quiet is it in your life right now? What area of your life do you wish Jesus would show up with thunder and lightning? What need do you wish Jesus would speak to with universe shaping and shaking volume? What front page grabbing miracle do you wish He would produce in your family at the moment? And instead, what you seem to hear is supreme silence. So quiet that even crickets would be welcomed. All you seem to see is a stone in place. Prayers seem unheard. Pleas seem to be ignored. This surely means that my tears must be unnoticed.

But let me ask you another question . . . Could it be that it is simply Saturday?

You don't know it. You may be unaware. It may seem over. It may seem hopeless. It may seem dead. A funeral may seem in order. But hold on. He is silent, but He isn't sleeping. He isn't resting. In fact, we know that He neither sleeps nor slumbers. Jesus is working. He isn't taking time off. He is taking matters out of our hands into His hands. The quite is only to get you to quit trying to do it yourself. The quite is simply forcing you to give Jesus room to work in ways you that can't.

**That is why we don't suffer in silence. We wait in silence. We anticipate in silence. We hope in silence. We believe in silence. We expect in silence. We surrender in silence. We watch for signs of life even when death is all we see.**

Silent Saturdays are some of the hardest days. It is the day between the struggle and the solution; the question and the answer; the offered prayer and the answered prayer. Saturday's silence can torment us if we forget the lesson of Saturday. We begin to ask

questions like, "Is God angry at me? Did God forget where I am? Did I disappoint him? Does He even care?" God knows Jesus is in the tomb, why doesn't He do something? Or, in your case God knows your career is in the tank, your finances are in the pit, your marriage is in a mess. Why doesn't He act? What are you supposed to do until He does? Force your own way? Forge your own way? Fight your own way? Find your own way? Fret your way?

Saturday teaches us to do what Jesus did. Lie still. Stay silent. Trust Him when you can't trace Him! Wait on the Lord and renew your strength. We have lost the discipline of standing still and knowing what Jesus knew . . . "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Acts 2:27 NIV).

In other words, if He is silent don't worry. He is a proven grave robber. If He is silent don't go back to fishing - your old way of life. Because . . .

**The quiet season is not a quit season.**

You keep doing what He said last until He says something new! Keep working. Keep believing. Keep praying. Keep serving. Keep on keeping on! Don't let the silence silence your praise or shut down your faith. If it is quiet, then it just means He is working in ways you can't!

**Easter**  
**The King's Son**  
**Steve Ely**

I. Introduction

I have a confession to make. I love westerns. Tv shows, movies and books. I realize the plot line is repeated. An outsider comes into a town controlled by an evil man and either over land or a woman the conflict and usually gunfire ensues. There are even statements that are repeated in my beloved westerns. Reach for the sky. Ride for the brand. Burning daylight. There is a new sheriff in town. It is this last statement that believe it or not this statement is applicable to Easter. Before Jesus' arrival on the scene as a baby until the day we are celebrating today there was a sheriff that ruled and reigned. He reigned in death. He was a cruel and hard taskmaster. Jesus' arrives on the scene and declares that there is a new sheriff in town and the battle ensues. Jesus' arrival creates a ruckus. The old sheriff doesn't want to give up control. In the middle of the fray Jesus enters the last week of His life and tells a story that shows how the old sheriff responds.

THOUGHT ABOUT REWRITING THIS AS A WESTERN STYLE STORY SOMETHING LIKE THIS -  
A man built a town. It was a dusty old town. Dirt road between weathered buildings. When it rained the road became a muddy mess. But the old town became the home to a few shops. A livery stable. A Mercantile. A hotel. An old church that doubled as a school. The man who built the town had to back east. While he was a gone a strong man arrived and made himself sheriff. He was a mean man. A cruel man. But he wore his gun low on his hip and a chip high on his shoulder. No one dared to question him. The man who built the town sent a representative back to see how his town was doing and the new sheriff threw the representative into the jail. The man sent another and again the rep was chained and jailed. Finally, the man decided to send his son. This time the cruel sheriff challenged the son to a gun fight in the middle of the street. The sheriff was lightning quick. He drew fast and his shot was accurate. Oddly the son never even touched his gun. It wasn't even close. The son lay dying in the street. The people knew that the man wouldn't let this go unpunished. They knew he would come and burn the entire town to the ground.

Luke 20:9-16 (NIV)

He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son,

whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’ “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

Jesus told a similar story in Luke 20. It doesn't have the western flair but it is the same story.

The religious leaders in Jesus' story and the town folk in mine knew the proper response from the land owner when his son was rejected. Shouldn't this be the same just response from the King when we reject His Son? He should punish us. Capital punishment. That would be right. The King's son mistreated. Mishandled. Rejected. Crucified. Dead. But here is the plot twist. Instead of punishing us The King's Son takes our punishment. It is the surprise ending that we call Easter. If this account was like every other western it would end here. But today is the day that reveals the secret ending and the plot twist. What would seem like the end of the story is really just the beginning. This is why Easter is so important. Because in my story the Son comes back to life and becomes the new sheriff in town. You can find it in . . .

Luke 24:1-6

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!

Now looking back we know that the blood that the King's Son spilled didn't destroy us it liberated us. It didn't bring our punishment, unless we continue to reject Him, instead the spilled blood brings us the opportunity for life!

So, now the question that must be asked is the same question the angels asked when Mary went to the tomb.

Why are we look for the living among the dead? We look for living among the dead. We look for life in things that only end up in death. We turn to drugs, parties, work, money, people, shopping, material items, hobby thinking these things will produce life when they only bring temporary "full fillment"! This is why the writer said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul!" We are looking for the living among the dead. If you want to find life, then you must look to life! Remember Jesus knew who He was as the King's Son. He is the way, the truth and the life! Then He states, "No one comes to the

Father except through Me." Real life and getting back into the good graces of the Father only takes place by entering through the King's Son.

There is a new sheriff in town today. He is no longer dead. He died on purpose so that when He came back to life that we could also experience in life. The new sheriff can bring you to life today too.