

## Reading Schedule for April 1-7, 2019

It's not too late to join the journey for our steps to Easter. What an ideal Gospel to read during this special season of the year. The Gospel of Mark highlights many events and teaching moments from Jesus.

**April 1 – Mark 4:** “Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.” (v.20) I chose this verse because that is what I pray for you and for me – that we would be faithful and engaging as representatives of Jesus Christ. The multiplication of our lives represents the influence that God can have through us for the Gospel in the lives of others. This is our mission. We are called to a life of purpose. This Sunday we learned about running the race, and that essentially means to complete the course, or to reach our goal. With a sense of purpose, we intentionally engage through loving relationships to all of those who God puts in our path. It reminds me of the parable of the talents, as the two talents multiplied into four talents. With the help of the Holy Spirit, your life can multiply. How do you respond to this most famous parable of the four soils?

**April 2 – Mark 5:** “He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.’” (v.34) After we spent two Sundays studying the meaning of faith, here we have a powerful result of a woman moving towards Jesus. Faith is essentially moving forward as we fix our eyes on Christ. She exemplifies that in a powerful way. It is a beautiful story full of faith. I wonder how long the Lord had prepared her heart. She was ready to move towards Jesus because she realized he was the One that could help her. This kind of faith is pleasing to God, and he is the rewarder of those who earnestly seek him. Don't you see that in her life? How do you respond to this story? What else catches your eye?

**April 3 – Mark 6:** “On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.” (v.29) Just picking a short verse from this very challenging story, I want you to contemplate the faith of John the Baptist. He reminds me of the faith of Abel, who gave a righteous offering to God in Genesis 4. But then his brother killed him. Here, John the Baptist is a young man serving God, but his life is cut off short. At least that is the way it would seem to us. However, we can realize that John the Baptist had completed his purpose on earth. Or, why would the Lord allow them to take his life? We think of a long life as how many years we get to enjoy life on earth, but in God's eyes a long life is with him in heaven forever. John the Baptist, in my opinion, has been experiencing a special place in heaven for these 2,000 years, and his time in eternity is just beginning. How do you interpret the abrupt death of John the Baptist? What else stands out to you in this chapter?

**April 4 – Mark 7:** “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’” (v.6) This is a very familiar prophecy from Isaiah that is quoted more than once in the New Testament. Hypocrisy is pretending to be something you are not, and have no intention of being. Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they worshiped God for the wrong reasons. Their worship was not

motivated by love, but by a desire to attain profit, to appear holy, and to increase their status among the people. We could fall into the trap of going through the motions without a genuine, heartfelt commitment to love God. We should always be willing to examine our hearts so that we are aware of the inner integrity of our lives. What we do on the outside is of no significance if it is not matched with inner authenticity. In this case, the Pharisees paid more attention to reputation than their character. They were more interested in religious practices, than remaining close to God. This principle always challenges me. How does it challenge you?

**April 5 – Mark 8:1-21:** “He sighed deeply and said, ‘Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.’” (v.12) This statement from Jesus caught my eye. So often we are eager for external evidence rather than internal conviction. Do we know what is true about God as expressed through his Son Jesus Christ? Yes we do! His truth is meant to sustain us. Jesus looked at their heart attitude and knew that it wasn't based on an eagerness to know him better, but rather a desire to prove him wrong. Jesus had already shown his true identity and spiritual authority in so many ways. That should have been enough to truly believe he was the Messiah. But unbelief filled their hearts. Please remember what we read in Hebrews 11 about people that were commended for their faith. Even though they did not receive what was promised, they stayed steadfast in their love and devotion to Christ. That is a message in this one short verse worth contemplating.

**April 6 – Mark 8:22-38:** “‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah.’” (v.29) I have shortened the readings as we get closer to Easter, allowing us to read these verses more than once as we seek to absorb the impact of Christ's life. Peter shares a word of revelation that is more fully expressed in Matthew 16:13-20. Jesus didn't tell them at this point that he was the Messiah, but Peter is the one who recognized the truth and shared it with the others. At this point, Jesus could speak plainly and directly to the disciples about his death and resurrection. He began to prepare them for what was going to happen to him by telling them three times that he would soon die. This is an interesting section; how might God be speaking to you through it?

**April 7 – Mark 9:1-29:** “He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer.’” (v.29) The emphasis of prayer is an important one. Jesus practiced prayer, and also encouraged them to pray. The principle of prayer is a delightful reminder that the most difficult situations can be changed through faithful and sincere prayer. Effective prayer is both the attitude of dependence and the action of asking. Prayer demonstrates our reliance on God as we humbly invite him to fill us with faith and power. There is no substitute for prayer, especially in circumstances that seem impossible. I am glad to be reminded about the significance that God intended through our communication to him in prayer. How do you respond to prayer? What do you learn about prayer in these verses?

**PRAYER: Pray that God will help us to be people of faith as we persevere to serve him.**