

Reading Schedule for April 10-16, 2017

If there is ever a week that we want to focus on God's Word and read about what Jesus did for us, this is the week. By Tuesday we will be reading about the triumphal entry, and everything else that follows will be connected to what Jesus did in his last week on earth. I am enjoying our reading in the Gospel of Mark; I am growing closer to Jesus because of the inspiration of these words. I hope the same is true for you. May the Lord bless you with a marvelous Easter week.

April 10 – Mark 10: “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (v.31) I highlight this verse because it is essentially the topic from Sunday's message. I refer to the fact that Jesus shows us how the kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. Every step that Jesus took was downward. From his eternal home in heaven to entry in Bethlehem and then being arrested as a criminal. All this he did for you and me. He showed us the pathway to greatness. He flipped the values of this world. We are bombarded by messages that tell us how to be important and how to feel good, and Jesus' teaching about service to others seems alien. But those who have humbly served others are most qualified to be great in heaven. Do you agree? How do you respond to this eternal principle?

April 11 – Mark 11: And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” (v.17) The Lord has reignited my prayer life. Verse 24 is also an inspiration for us to pray. This statement about God's house being a house of prayer is in the context of people making it a place of profit. The moneychangers often inflated the exchange rate for their own benefit and wealth. Jesus became angry because God's house of worship became cluttered with the things of this world. I have written an ebook on praying for ten minutes a day and the amazing way that God can use such a discipline. It will be available on Easter Sunday, as you will see. Join me in praying to God in worship, confession, petition and intercession, and I believe your life will be strengthened. How do you respond to prayer?

April 12 – Mark 12: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.’ And they were amazed at him.” (v.17) This chapter is Jesus' interactions with the leaders and people who were in the temple area. He would return to Jerusalem each and every day of this final week to teach the people and confront the religious elite. Yesterday, he turned the tables in the temple. Today he is confronting the religious establishment through parables. But this statement about Caesar shows his incredible wisdom. There was hatred for the Romans and their taxation. Jesus does not hate. It is a matter of priority. Citizenship in a nation requires that we pay money for the services and benefits that we receive. Jesus affirms that. But he also elevates the significance of being in God's kingdom. Our lives, bear God's image, and so we belong to him. The coin bears the emperor's image and, like it or not, taxes are a part of this world. How are you impressed by Jesus' wisdom in this chapter? What stirs your heart?

April 13 – Mark 13: “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” (v.14) As Jesus anticipates his death and resurrection, he also talks about the future. His message about the future is three times as long in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24. They both mention this

particular event which points to the antichrist. 2 Thessalonians 2:4 says, “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” A very clear and undeniable sign of Christ's soon return will be the antichrist. Those will be terrible days, beyond anything that we have experienced so far. In the meantime, we witness on behalf of Christ, serve others, and share the good news that salvation is available through Jesus Christ. Are you with me?! How do you respond to Jesus' teaching in this chapter?

April 14 – Mark 14: “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (v.36) Last night at the Bible study I lead, I asked everyone which event in the final week of Jesus inspires them. When I introduced myself, I said, “The Garden of Gethsemane.” But this is the specific verse that stirs my heart the most. This is a marvelous prayer because he surrendered himself to the Father's will. I also like that Mark includes the word, “Abba, Father,” in his address. This agonizing time of prayer was Jesus affirming the Father's will and surrendering to his purpose of sacrificing his life for the sins of the world. He was willing to pay the price so that you and I could have eternal life. Thank you Jesus. Is this the event that stirs your heart the most? What else did you notice in this chapter that gets your attention?

April 15 – Mark 15: “And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’).” (v.34) This is big – that Jesus would take our sins upon himself and then be separated from the Father God. This comes from Psalm 22 as David prophesied about the deep agony that the Messiah would suffer and die for the sins of the world. Jesus was announcing that he was temporarily separated from God as he took these sins on himself. It was the very separation that he dreaded as he prayed in Gethsemane. The physical agony of crucifixion is beyond horrible, but the spiritual alienation from God was the ultimate torture for Jesus. This is a very important spiritual truth. The reading today will especially prepare your heart for the celebration tomorrow as we focus on our resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ. How is God speaking to you this week?

April 16 – Mark 16: “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” (v.8) You see a very interesting transition in New Testament scholarship with a long explanation to the credibility of vv. 9-20. But let's say that the Gospel of Mark ends at verse 8. Does that weaken the testimony? The women have heard the words of the angel and are witnesses of the empty tomb. They leave with astonishment, as anyone would. The incredible fact that the women were the first witnesses is verification of the credibility and authenticity of these words. Women were not witnesses in a court of law. It is as if you and I get to decide about the hope of the empty tomb. I believe that vv. 9-20 are inspired by God, but I also believe that the open-ended nature of vv. 1-8 puts the ball in our court. What is your decision about the resurrection? How will you respond? This is the crux of our faith! He is risen!

Prayers: Pray for the marvelous possibilities of what God might do in our lives and through our ministry this week as we honor the final week of Jesus.