

Reading Schedule for April 15-21, 2019

These readings coincide with the last week of Jesus' life, leading up to the cross and the glorious resurrection that we will celebrate on Sunday. Even though I divide the chapters in half, there is still a lot of material for us to contemplate. May this be a meaningful week of prayer and connection to Christ.

April 15 – Mark 13:1-13: “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

(v.10) There is no doubt that the description that Jesus gives of the close of the age was very intense. Every other gospel writer points in that direction as well. But one verse that always clarifies things for me is about the gospel being preached to all nations. Matthew wrote it this way, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14) It may be hard to discern whether these signs are happening right now, and if we are close to the culmination of the age. But we know with certainty that all people will be exposed to the gospel, and then the end will come. This is a very helpful clarification for us, since we so often wonder if we are in the last days. What do you notice in these verses about Jesus' description of the last days?

April 16 – Mark 13:14-37: “But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.’” (v.24) There could be several verses to highlight, but this one is repeated many times in the Scriptures. It is usually referred to as the Day of the Lord. Many prophets highlight these cosmic events. The very next event in this sequence is the appearance of Jesus in the clouds as he gathers his elect, which we have often called the Rapture. The Day of the Lord is known as a time when God releases his wrath on the people of the world who have rejected him and his offer of salvation. There is no hiding any longer. Their sins are exposed and they are punished. Their wish will be forever enforced, as they will be separated from God forever. This is why we have an urgency for the mission, that we might spread the message of Christ to as many as possible. How do you respond to this teaching about the signs of Christ's return?

April 17 – Mark 14:1-31: “‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.” (v.24) This past Sunday I spoke on Jesus washing the disciples' feet in the Upper Room. Most scholars believe that Jesus shared the Passover meal, washed the disciples' feet, and then instituted what we know as Communion, or the Lord's Table. The meaning that he would give to the cup of redemption would be perfectly clear to the disciples after he shed his blood and died on our behalf. Christ's death on the cross seals a new covenant between God and mankind. Jesus can be thought of as the spotless Lamb of God as his sacrifice would forgive sins once and for all. Now all who come to God through Christ can be confident of the forgiveness of their sins and the salvation of their souls. In the intensity of these events, Jesus is pointing to the eternal relationship we can have with him. How do you respond to these events of preparation leading to Jesus' arrest?

April 18 – Mark 14:32-72: “He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, ‘I don't know this man you're talking about.’” (v.71) As I was studying Peter's response to Jesus' washing feet, it became clear to me why Peter was so

vulnerable to actually crumble under the pressure of being recognized as one of Jesus' followers. Peter had not really surrendered to Jesus as one who desperately needed Christ's forgiveness. He related to Jesus on his own terms. It is easy for us to do the same. But I assure you that we will be very vulnerable if we withhold from God our surrendered hearts. Confession and repentance is the forerunner to freedom and victory. Humility before Christ is the forerunner for him lifting us up and giving us the strength to remain steadfast in him. I hope you notice this in Peter, and will contemplate how this applies to your own life.

April 19 – Mark 15:1-20: “‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate. ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied.” (v.2) I am interested in the fact that in Mark's account, Jesus only speaks one time before Pilate. You might not notice the interesting way that the Jewish authorities present Jesus, “He claimed to be the King of the Jews.” They did not accuse him of blasphemy because Pilate wouldn't even care about that. But to be a king was to challenge Caesar's authority, and in the eyes of Rome, a capital offense. One of the most powerful prophecies about Jesus and his suffering comes from Isaiah 53. In verse 7 it says, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. . .” Jesus had so much to say, but he did not retaliate, as he was willing and ready to give his life as a sacrifice for the world. We realize this when later at the cross he said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” as he took the sins of the world upon his shoulders and was separated from the Father for the very first time.

April 20 – Mark 15:21-47: “With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.” (v.37) Jesus died on the cross as he took his last breath. In John's account, we learn that he took his last breath and he said these words, “It is finished.” Once Jesus dies, all mocking ceases. Only the voices of the respectful centurion, or the mourners were recorded. Jesus died around the time of the daily afternoon sacrifice in the temple. The curtain was torn in two, all exemplifying the fact that Jesus has made relationship with the Father God possible. He has broken down the dividing wall, and we now have access to the eternal God. This makes all his suffering worth it, and at the same time, heightens our appreciation and love for him. How do you respond to Jesus dying on the cross?

April 21 – Mark 16:1-20: “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’” (v.15) The glorious gospel is what we appreciate and embrace as our hope for eternal fellowship with God in heaven one day. We call it the good news. As recipients of the good news, we are now called to share it with the world. The principle of receiving and then extending is seen over and over again in God's Word. If you have received mercy, then share mercy. If you have been comforted, give comfort. If you have been liberated from sin, share the same opportunity with the world. Our genuine appreciation of what the resurrection means to us will be seen in our excitement and courage to share it with others. How is this Easter different for you? What would it look like for you to live in the power of the resurrection every day?

PRAYER: Pray for the response of the gospel that will be shared as we open our doors to family and friends and acquaintances on Easter morning.