

Reading Schedule for April 3-9, 2017

We are taking one step at a time towards Easter 2017. Reading the Gospel of Mark is a great way to prepare our hearts for the joy of the resurrection. Mark includes more about the life of Jesus than any other gospel. He doesn't often go into details, but he tells us all the different things that Jesus did. Christ's actions point to the fact that he was the One who came to save the world. He was full of compassion; he performs powerful miracles; he intersperses teaching. Let us be inspired as we read about Jesus in action.

April 3 – Mark 3: “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.” (v.13) I am intrigued by the word “called.” It reminds me of Romans 8:30, which highlights “called,” “justified” and “glorified.” Everything is propelled into motion by the call of God. The call becomes real when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. But God's calling is incomplete with mere salvation, as good as that is; he wants us to be fruitful. God has a calling on your life to serve him. When he calls the disciples, it is as if they said, “Yes, Lord, I believe in you and I want to follow you.” These twelve disciples would be so essential to the advancement of the Kingdom of God. As you know, it wouldn't be 100% successful because Judas would betray him. You have a calling on your life. How do you respond to God's call?

April 4 – Mark 4: “Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word . . .” (v.18) The way Jesus presents this parable, it seems that it becomes the parable that launches all other parables. In each of the gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke all include this parable as the first one that Jesus taught. This is most likely true, but even if it isn't, it becomes the launch to Jesus using parables in his teaching. The four soils obviously represent four different ways people respond to God's message. You can identify people in your life that fall into each one of these four ways of responding. It is easy to see how the third soil is so prevalent in today's world. We are busy people with many worries. Our culture is enamored with materialism. Ask yourself if the meaning of soil #3 applies to your life. How do you respond to this first and foremost parable by Jesus?

April 5 – Mark 5: “He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘*Talitha koum!*’ (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).” (v.41) This culminates a chapter of Jesus performing miracles. He shows his power over evil spirits, his ability to heal, and the power over death itself. These are all included in this chapter. I found this chapter to be very inspiring. But Jesus not only demonstrated great power. He also showed tremendous compassion. His power over nature, evil spirits, and even death was motivated by compassion. The demon-possessed man lived among tombs and was isolated and all alone. The diseased woman was being neglected by those around her. And the loss of a little girl is the most devastating kind of loss. Jesus extended his power to help with a heart of compassion. How does this chapter move you?

April 6 – Mark 6: “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’” (v.31) A few weeks ago I spoke on Sabbath rest. Jesus is aware of the reason that the Father God had in mind for his creation. The disciples had been serving God on mission with Jesus. Jesus recognized that to be effective in this world, there is a need for periodic rest and renewal. This time of solitude would not last very long because the people were clamoring to see Jesus

do more miracles. I encourage you to turn to Isaiah 30:15, and meditate on that short verse about the affirmation of quietness and rest. How have you been enjoying your Sundays? Since I spoke on this important theme a month ago, I have felt more refreshed with a restful focus on Sundays. Thank God for his concern for us. Our Lord is very realistic . . . he knows we are human beings.

April 7 – Mark 7: He replied, “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) I have always been compelled by this verse as I recognize it throughout the Scriptures. Whenever a principle is presented in the Old Testament and reaffirmed in the New Testament it gets my attention. You see how important integrity is to the Lord. The Pharisees had put on a show concerning their allegiance to God. Their worship was not motivated by love, but by a desire to be noticed. What we do on the outside, but does not match the inside, is wasted. The Lord is concerned about our heart, which then motivates us to love and serve him. In the teaching of these verses, Jesus emphasized the importance of what happens on the inside that flows out of a person's heart. Proverbs 4:23 challenges us to guard our hearts, because from it flows the springs of life. How do you understand the importance of your inner life? Why do you think God cares about that more than what we do on the outside?

April 8 – Mark 8: “He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.” (v.31) The whole purpose of our readings during this special time of the year is to prepare our hearts for Easter. Jesus would begin to prepare his disciples hearts with the message that he would suffer and die, but then be raised three days later. This is hard for the disciples to understand, and so as a spokesman for the disciples, Peter rebukes Jesus. You can understand why Peter would be concerned; he did not want Jesus to suffer. He wasn't thinking of Isaiah 53, but Jesus was. Jesus would then tell them about the challenging life of being his follower. These words are repeated in the other Gospels, “He must deny himself and pick up his cross and follow me.” (v.34) How do you respond to the challenging message of sacrifice and suffering that is required for those who follow Christ? What else stands out to you in this chapter?

April 9 – Mark 9: “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” (v.3) This is one of my favorite events, and it was so impressive to Peter that he mentions it in his writings in 2 Peter (1:16). Christ's true nature was transformed before Peter, James and John, as well as the visitation of Moses and Elijah. Their appearance showed Jesus as the fulfillment of both the Old Testament law and the prophetic promises. As God's only Son he surpasses them in authority and power. Jesus had been showing himself through the miraculous power of God to heal and to control nature, but now they see who he really is as his beauty and glory are transfigured before them. Revelation chapter 1 also gives us a glimpse of Jesus, who appeared to John in a glorious way. We will one day see the glory of Jesus. How does this event inspire you? What else catches your attention in this chapter?

Prayers: Pray for your own heart as you step into Easter week. What does God want to do in your life? How do you want to pursue him?