

Reading Schedule for April 8-14, 2019

This week we will notice the red letters because Jesus does a lot of teaching and explaining to those around him and to his disciples. We will anticipate Palm Sunday as well, even as we sing “Hosanna in the Highest” this coming Sunday

April 8 – Mark 9:30-50: “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.” (v.43) This is startling language, but it is not meant to promote self-mutilation. But instead, it stresses the importance of cutting out sin in your life. It reminds me of what Karen taught on from Hebrews 12:1, when it tells us to “throw off anything that gets in the way and the sin that so easily entangles us.” We must ruthlessly remove sin from our lives, knowing that sin will always keep us from God’s best. It also affects our relationships with the Lord, and with other people. I want to encourage you to confess your sin to the Lord, as well as repent, because that means moving in a new direction. Say no to the things that weigh you down, and yes to the life that Jesus has to give you through the Holy Spirit day by day. How do you respond to this challenging statement? What else in these verses highlighting the words of Jesus did you notice?

April 9 – Mark 10:1-31: “At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.” (v.22) I chose this verse because we all can relate to the strong pull of things and possessions in our society. This message is similar to the previous day’s message, as Jesus was challenging this man to admit that his wealth was his god. He failed in the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3) The man’s true state had been laid bare, but he did not repent. Why is it so difficult for a rich person to follow the Lord? Because we find our security and identity in the things we have. Our own abundance leads to self-sufficiency. Obviously a person could have everything on earth and still lack what is most important – the gift of eternal life found in Jesus Christ alone. There is more to this story that I could share, but let these thoughts stir up your heart to want Christ more than anything else.

April 10 – Mark 10:32-52: “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant . . .” (v.43) This reminds me of Sunday’s sermon, which focused on Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. Jesus, who was the greatest, became the servant of all. We learn clearly in these verses that Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. Because Christ is our example, we are called to do the same. Don’t be too critical of James and John because we can be very much like them. Clearly Jesus taught that true greatness comes from serving others. I believe that the greatest rewards in heaven will be given to those who serve sacrificially, following the footsteps of Jesus. How is the Lord calling you to wash the feet of others?

April 11 – Mark 11:1-11: “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9) Matthew actually quotes this verse in his account of Jesus entering Jerusalem on the donkey. Zechariah wrote, 500 years before this event, predicting the entry of the Messiah with great acclaim. The people understood that Jesus was fulfilling the prophesy of the prophet Zechariah. The crowd quickly understood this, but they did not

understand the nature of Christ’s kingdom. They were sure he was going to come and overthrow the Romans, even as he entered Jerusalem in this way. So, a few days later, they would cry, “Crucify him!” This is a short reading, so I wanted you to contemplate the beginning of this final week of Christ. How are you preparing your hearts for Easter on April 21st?

April 12 – Mark 11:12-33: “On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves . . .” (v.15) This event is highlighted in every Gospel account. Even John highlights Jesus clearing the temple in chapter 2. Some have suggested that Jesus cleared the temple twice. But Mark connects Jesus clearing the temple with the fig tree that bears no fruit. I believe the two go together. The temple was supposed to be a place of worship, but true worship had disappeared. The fig tree showed a promise of fruit, but it produced none. Jesus responds in righteous anger because there was no real life in what they were doing at the temple. If we claimed to have faith, but there is no fruit, we are like the barren fig tree. Genuine faith has great potential. Ask God to help you bear fruit for his kingdom. How do you respond to Jesus becoming angry and cleansing the temple? What else do you notice in this reading today?

April 13 – Mark 12:1-27: “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) Is there any wiser statement that Jesus could give in such a situation?! They were trying to trick him, but he was wiser than they were. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 it reads, “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” Jesus means so much to us, but maybe you haven’t thought of him as being your wisdom. Relationship with Christ results in our having God’s wisdom. The Apostle Paul said in Colossians 2:3, “. . . in whom (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” As the Lord is leading your life and my life, we can lean into him for the kind of wisdom necessary in a very challenging world where the message of Christ is opposed. May God give us wisdom in the day-to-day issues of life.

April 14 – Mark 12:28-44: In the church calendar, today begins Holy Week. You may not like that title, but I want to set apart this time as a special time of seeking the Lord and taking special effort to draw near to him. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (v.30) This is the strongest commandment in the Bible. It transcends the Old and the New Testament. It is timeless and will draw us into eternity as people who love God with our whole being. When you love God completely, and care for others as you care for yourself, then you are fulfilling the intent of God’s Word. May this commandment rule our thoughts, decisions and actions. May it stir up our heart to seek God wholeheartedly as we anticipate Easter one week from today.

PRAYER: Pray for the many opportunities we have every week to represent the Gospel to others. Ask the Lord to help us make the most of every opportunity.