

Reading Schedule for March 19-25, 2018

I hope you enjoy this week of readings emphasizing Old Testament Scriptures that have connection to Christ's death and resurrection. In many church traditions this season is called Lent. These Scriptures are often used as readings to remind us of God's plan from the very beginning to send his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Even in our first reading, which takes place in the Garden of Eden, God promised that he would crush the devil through the woman's offspring. Most believe that this is a clear reference to what Jesus would do. These Scriptures will be inspiring in and of themselves, but will also point to God's provision of the Messiah.

March 19 - Genesis 3: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (v.15) I believe this is the first announcement of the Gospel. In this text a serpent is viewed as more than a mere snake, something which the narrative itself implies, given the serpent's ability to speak and the vile things he says. While we don't read specifically that the serpent should be understood as Satan, we see that mentioned in the Book of Revelation, affirming the fact that he is the accuser of the brethren and began his devilish schemes in the very beginning of creation. I believe the offspring of the woman was pointing right to Christ, he is the fulfillment. It is clear that a crushing blow to the head is more significant than a bruised heel. Jesus would defeat Satan through his death and resurrection. How do you respond to this chapter about the fall of man? How does verse 15 give you hope?

March 20 - Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?" (v.1) This verse, and several other verses, point to the suffering of Jesus. Many believe that the primary reason for writing this Psalm is to foretell the work of the Savior and what he would go through for you and me. Obviously Jesus had this in mind when he was on the cross and expressed these identical words. The Psalm can refer to the lament of any innocent sufferer, but it is so clearly identified with Jesus as verses 14-18 specifically express what Jesus went through. How do you experience this Psalm personally? How did David's words inspire you about Jesus' sacrifice?

March 21 - Psalm 91: "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways . . ." (v.11) Are you familiar with this verse? It is used in the New Testament as one of the devil's quotes to Jesus. The devil misuses this Psalm purposefully, and never are we encouraged to put ourselves in unnecessary danger to show off God. The Psalm as a whole is marvelous. It has so many wonderful connections for us concerning God's faithfulness, his help in trouble, and the assurance of salvation found in him. Jesus would provide all of this on an even deeper level. Mark 16 refers to verse 13, and the last three verses have a very strong message about relationship with God and Him never leaving us. How do you respond to this Psalm? In what specific ways do you see these words being fulfilled by Jesus?

March 22 - Isaiah 53: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (v.5) This is the most well-known Scripture in the Old Testament about the sacrifice of Jesus. Every line points to him. There are Old Testament prophecies that connect us to the promise of the Messiah and what he would do, but this one is over the top. The suffering servant bore the sins of people as he himself was innocent. Isaiah clearly portrays the severity of how the servant would be punished and rejected by

mankind. Verse 10 says that this is all God's will. He had a divine purpose so that the Messiah would bear the sins of the world. This text reminds me of Philipians 2:5-11. Our Lord suffered greatly, but he would also be exalted. Which verse especially gets your attention? How do you respond to this prophecy about Jesus' suffering as he took on the sins of the world?

March 23 - Habakkuk 3: "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights." (v.19) I used the last verse in this chapter as the proper conclusion. This is Habakkuk's prayer and it's worth praying throughout the Lenten season. There are many points of identification for us that heightens our sense of devotion to the Lord and allows us to be honest about our troubles. As we draw near to the Lord, we realize that we are unworthy to enter his presence, but he willingly accepts our prayers of confession. Verses 17-19 are the culmination of this prayer, and especially meaningful as the prophet prays with grateful worship to the Lord no matter what might take place. These are famous words tucked away in this small little book toward the close of the Old Testament. They are powerful words to read and to contemplate how they apply to your life. What part of this prayer is especially meaningful to you? Why?

March 24 - Joel 2:12-32: "'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'" (v.12) These words are associated with brokenness and pleading to God. They represent the kind of prayer that would be especially appropriate during Lent. Lent is especially connected to people returning to the Lord with deep love and dependency. The phrase "all your heart" reveals a wholehearted devotion as we are especially open with God and deeply surrendered to him. The character of God is unchanging; he is merciful and gracious to us day after day. The Psalm will continue with this emphasis of God's mercy and hope of renewal through the Holy Spirit. May the Lord pour out his Spirit on us during these opportune days. Every believer anticipates God moving in a fresh and new way, leading to the culmination of the age. The prophet Joel shared these inspiring words 2,600 years ago. What aspect of this prophecy stirred your heart the most?

March 25 - Zechariah 9:9-17: "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." (v.9) This is the most well-known verse in this prophecy, and possibly in the whole Book of Zechariah. It is directly quoted in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15. Today is Palm Sunday, and this is the day we commemorate Jesus entering Jerusalem as the worthy king and the very Son of God. One riding on a donkey would exemplify one coming in peace and not as a military mount, which would most likely be on a horse. Through Christ's entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he clearly identified himself as the Messiah. This was always thought of as a Messianic prophecy. This prophecy would also point to the purpose of the coming king, that he would save his people. There are several phrases that point to the saving work of Jesus Christ as the coming king. I am sure you are familiar with this particular text, and so I encourage you to spend some time in personal worship to Christ, even as you remember the people shouting "Hosanna" as Jesus entered Jerusalem. How do you respond to this prophecy?

Prayers - Pray that the Lord will move on his people, and on those who are yet to come to know him during this Easter season.