

Reading Schedule for March 26 – April 1, 2018

Each of the Gospel accounts has a thorough presentation on the Passion of Christ. In Matthew, the launch to these final hours of Jesus' life is very clear as we begin with chapter 26. I am confident that these seven readings will enrich your Holy Week experience as you contemplate what Jesus has gone through for you.

March 26 - Matthew 26:1-30: "Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (v.13) This story has always intrigued me. John records it in chapter 12:1-11 as an event that happened before Jesus' triumphal entry. Nonetheless, it is essentially portraying a woman who understood the value of Jesus and expressed it with an extravagant gesture of generosity. I imagine you will look forward to meeting her in heaven, as the Bible clearly portrays that her act will be remembered throughout history. Judas tries to spoil this event, but Jesus won't let him. We also read about the Lord's Supper in these verses. This is a great launch to the week, even as we sense the tension mounting and the significance of each event increasing. How do you respond to these verses as we begin this special week for believers?

March 27 - Matthew 26:31-56: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (v.53) Someone was asking me about the number of angels in a legion. I always thought it was 12,000, but I read in my study Bible that it was 6,000. Still this is affirming that Jesus could have called 72,000 angels to his side to fend for him. But he never did. In the Gospel of John, it says that when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, they asked Jesus to identify himself and he said, "I Am," and all the soldiers fell back to the ground. I think there were angels pushing those soldiers over. In verse 56 it said, "All the disciples left him and fled." What if the disciples would have been praying more fervently in the garden? Would they have been prepared for this kind of opposition? The disciples scattered in fear because they were not fortified in faith. But Jesus was unrelenting in his courage to endure the cross. Hebrews 12:2 says, "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." After our Lord prayed in the garden, he had a determination to follow through with the Father's will. How do you respond to this reading today?

March 28 - Matthew 26:57-75: "Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly." (v.75) I remember reading about Peter's remorse. There is no question that Peter was trying to demonstrate a sense of courage as he was sitting outside in the courtyard in a hostile environment. Jesus was arrested and people were very agitated. But his courage faded so quickly when he was confronted. The way that it displays Peter's response, it's as if he was swearing that he wasn't lying. It's like he reached the peak denial, and then the rooster crowed. As you know, Peter remained fearful and full of shame for some time. But by the end of the Gospel of John, the Lord restores Peter and he becomes a refined man in the Gospel ministry. Do not let your sinful mistakes sideline you in your mission for Christ. Admit you are wrong and experience the restoring grace of Jesus Christ. Get back in the game. How do you respond to this passage?

March 29 - Matthew 27:1-26: "Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified." (v.26) Recently I was with a group of

people and I asked them what aspect of Jesus' suffering and death stood out to them the most? From the time that he had the Last Supper to his crucifixion, what event surfaces for you? My response was the 39 lashes. Roman flogging was a horrifically cruel punishment. Those condemned to it were tied to a post and beaten with a leather whip that was interwoven with pieces of bone and metal, which tore apart skin and tissue. In some cases, the flogging itself was fatal. The Romans flogged Jesus nearly to death so that he actually died rather quickly on the cross, unlike other criminals. Jesus did that for me. What event in Jesus' last 18 hours touches your heart the most? Why?

March 30 - Matthew 27:27-44: "When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots." (v.35) It is interesting to me that some of these very gruesome forms of punishment are mentioned so casually. Yesterday we read about Jesus being scourged, and it said it so casually. Now today we read that he was crucified. Crucifixion was one of the most cruel forms of execution known to mankind. There was excruciating pain, along with public shame, that made it a terrible way to die. Hanging suspended eventually caused great difficulty in breathing, which could be alleviated only by pushing up with one's feet to take the weight off the arms. But that motion itself would cause severe pain in the feet, legs and back. Eventually the victim would succumb to suffocation if he had not already have died of the result of the cumulative effect of the physical trauma inflicted on him. How is God speaking to you through this reading today?

March 31 - Matthew 27:45-66: "About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, ema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')." (v.46) This is probably the most well-known statement from the cross that Jesus cried out. Last week we read Psalm 22, and the very first verse includes these words. When Jesus accepted the mission to drink the cup, as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was talking about taking on God's wrath. It seems that Jesus had to be cut off from his connection to the Father because he was bearing the sins of all the world, and therefore enduring God's wrath. This is what Jesus dreaded the most. With these words, Jesus announces his separation from the Father, and at the same time he is an offering for our sins. How do you respond to the message of the cross?

April 1 - Matthew 28:1-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (v.19) These are the last words that Matthew records from Jesus. It is very interesting that making disciples was the main idea. In other words, it explains the central focus of the great commission. It is the only verb. All the rest are Greek participles that modify the verb. Making disciples is a process that begins with receiving the message, being baptized into the Body, and then living out the truth of God through the work of Christ within (that being the Holy Spirit). The crucial element of the Christian life can be referred to as discipleship. This means that God's goal for us is to become more like Christ day by day. His resurrection life in you, as it becomes deeper and more influential, will transform you into the likeness of Jesus Christ. That's what God wants to do in you and how he wants to use you in others. What does the resurrection mean to you?

Prayers - Pray for the proclamation of the Gospel as we gather on Resurrection Sunday. And even as we invite our neighbors to the Easter Egg hunt, may the Lord bring people to himself.