



A Bible Reading Plan for Holy Week

April 14-21, 2019

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



Holy Week 2019

Palm Sunday, April 14 | Luke 19:28-40 | Mary Splawn

"A Donkey's Tale"

I love Palm Sunday at our church. The kids all gather at the back of our worship space and then proceed forward toward the altar in wonderful chaos waving palm branches while we sing the refrain "Hosanna in the Highest." I enjoy seeing the children participating in worship, but getting them to go down the aisle can sometimes be a little like herding cats. Imagine if we added a donkey colt to the mix!

Speaking of a colt, the details about the young donkey in Luke 19 have always been curious to me. I mean, what does a colt have to do with Jesus anyway?

Perhaps, the author shares details about the donkey to show that Jesus is our omniscient Lord. Jesus instructs his disciples to go into the village and get the donkey. He knows exactly where the colt will be tied and he also knows that this animal has never been ridden before. He warns the disciples that someone may question them taking the donkey and that they should just say, "The Lord has need of it." And...the events occurred exactly as Jesus had said.

Or maybe, Luke mentions the donkey to highlight the fact that Jesus is different from other kings. Rulers would typically enter the city in processional fashion on a magnificent horse. Not Jesus. He comes on a lowly donkey symbolizing humility and peace. Unlike other kings, his battle victory is not against other nations, rather his victories are over disease, hunger, oppression, and corruption. This triumphal entry is his pathway to the cross and empty tomb where our glorious King wins the battle against sin and death.

It is likely that Luke includes details of the colt to confirm in the hearts of readers that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. He is the anticipated one spoken of in Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Who knows, the donkey may be mentioned for all of these reasons and even to highlight the validity of the story. If Jesus' story were a fairytale, I don't think the donkey would have a lead role. But God's work on earth is not made up! These are true events we'll read about this week which highlight the saving work of Jesus our Lord. This is cause for us to rejoice and praise God as the multitudes did on that day. Jesus is our omniscient Lord, our glorious King, our promised Messiah who reigns triumphant now and forevermore, Amen.



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Monday, April 15 | Luke 19:45-48 | Wayne Splawn

“True and Sincere Worship”

The love of money and the desire for power often corrupt even the best things in life. A cursory look at history and current day headlines reveals each of these sinful inclinations of the heart have led even the noblest of people to commit acts they once thought unimaginable. We regularly see the devastating effects of such abuses in the worlds of politics, athletics, business, higher education, and yes, even in communities of faith.

This was certainly the case in Jesus' day. In Luke 19:45-48, we find Luke's account of Jesus confronting those who had turned the Temple into a marketplace. The Lord intended for the Temple to be a place of prayer and sincere worship, but the religious leaders of Jesus' day had turned it into a den of robbers. In quoting from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah when leveling charges against the money-changers, Jesus reveals the abuse that was happening in the Temple in his day was nothing new. Unfortunately, there have always been people who have distorted the worship of God for personal gain.

It would be easy for us to feel disdain for the money-changers and religious leaders of Jesus' day or modern-day television preachers who convince viewers to send checks so they can finance their private planes. However, a more helpful approach to this passage might be for each of us to reflect on the motivations that undergird our own acts of devotion. Do we draw near to the Lord out of a sincere desire to know and worship him or are we trying to give the appearance of religious zeal in hopes of winning the approval of others? Do we draw near to the Lord because we want to develop a deeper relationship with him, or are we going through the motions of religion in hopes that God will reward us with material blessings or positions of power? May the Lord reveal the true condition of our hearts so that we might increasingly be a community of faith who worships the Lord in spirit and in truth.

Tuesday, April 18 | Luke 20:9-18 | Tim Sanderlin

“No One Walks Away The Same”

The Parable of the Tenants is one that is often misunderstood; the characters can be easy to place (the landowner is the Father and Christ is the Son), but the severity of it goes unnoticed. Jesus is standing before the ones who are currently plotting to kill him and who will soon crucify him telling them a parable of grace, mercy, and judgement. This is one of Jesus' final warnings he is able to give to the Pharisees before the cross—will they listen?

As Christ is finishing his story, he looks directly at the Pharisees to make sure they hear his words and asks them a question about words they are familiar with found in Psalm 118—“What is the meaning of these words?” Christ is reminding them of prophecies told long ago about who Jesus was and the ones who



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would reject him, and the Pharisees understand completely what he is saying! They know he is challenging them, telling them that they are the ones that have been warned about for generations, that they are ignoring the Cornerstone—the one on which all salvation hinges. Their reaction tells us much about their pride.

When we all hear of the good news of Christ, his payment of our sin and his resurrection, no one walks away the same. When Zacchaeus hears the gospel just one chapter before this one, he is led to repent, repay those he has wronged, and rejoice! The news of salvation takes some major humbling on our part to admit we cannot do it ourselves; when the Pharisees hear Jesus say he is the Cornerstone (or, the foundation of their faith), they are not moved to tears or to repentance; rather, they are moved to anger and hatred! In verse 19 we see that the Pharisees hear their need for Jesus and they want to arrest and kill him on the spot, showing their self-preservation trumps their deepest need of being fully known and loved. Jesus is unrelenting with extending the hand of grace, but we see that the Pharisees do not accept it time and time again. Jesus reminds us in the final verse of the final destination of man—either we reside with Christ, or we will be crushed under the weight of judgment.

Wednesday, April 17 | Luke 21:37-22:2 | Ben Winder

“Loosened Liturgies And Open Eyes”

Liturgy can be a powerful thing. The rituals, ceremonies, and traditions of worship can provide us well-worn paths as we try to follow the way of Jesus in faithfulness. We see even here that Jesus was himself one who found value in the familiar rhythms life so often provides. Each day, we're told, he was teaching to gathered crowds in the temple. Each night he was sleeping on the Mount of Olives. Such was the pattern of Jesus' last days of ministry in Jerusalem. If you have not found a particular liturgy in your personal devotional life, perhaps this week might be a perfect time to try some on for size. Keeping a predictable rhythm in life or couching our faith journey in the ancient (or not-so-ancient) rites of our favorite liturgies can be helpful tools for living lives of faithfulness.

For others of us, however, if we're not careful, we can elevate practices and liturgies (religious or otherwise) to the point that our fear of losing them might blind us to the work of God in our midst. This, it seems was the case for the chief priests and teachers of the law. We are told that as Passover draws near, they are looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Perhaps, really, they were afraid the people's interest in Jesus would keep them from engaging in those practices they held sacrosanct. Perhaps for some of us, as we draw ever nearer the cross this week, we can be challenged to detach ourselves from our familiar patterns, to loosen our grip on our beloved traditions, and let our fear of upsetting the status quo be replaced with an openness to what God is doing.



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Today is the day, this passage is the turning point. Jesus' ministry as teacher is drawing to a close. Passover is drawing near. As we begin Luke 22, we begin Jesus' passion narrative. What steps might you take to walk into it with eyes wide open to experience it more fully this year than ever before?

Maundy Thursday, April 18 | Luke 22:39-53 | Amy Hirsch

"Go to Dark Gethsemane"

Today's text would have taken place on the night prior to Christ's crucifixion, "Maundy Thursday." The gospels tell us that a lot took place this evening, including Jesus washing the disciples' feet and instituting the Lord's Supper. But Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives, in the Garden of Gethsemane, always stands out to me. Luke recounted Christ's agony before God, when he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42 ESV).

I don't think Jesus' prayer was motivated by fear of death. After all, Jesus prophesied that God would raise him to life on the third day (John 2:19). Rather, Jesus knew the price he would pay for the disobedience of humanity; that he who knew no sin would become sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ felt the weight of the suffering before him, the cup of God's wrath he would drink on humanity's behalf. And so he cried out in anguish, asking God if perhaps there might be another way. And yet, Jesus expressed his resolve to follow the Father, no matter the cost.

We often sing James Montgomery's hymn "Go to Dark Gethsemane" at our Maundy Thursday service. As I was reflecting on this hymn and this passage, I was reminded that Christ went to dark Gethsemane for us, and there, he voiced the prayer that we too would pray throughout the ages: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup ... yet not my will, but your will be done."

I don't know the path you are walking, but I do know that the Christian life is a way acquainted with sorrow and grief. The world is full of suffering, and we are all groaning and waiting for redemption. And sometimes, we pray that God would remove the cup from us, and He does. The sickness is cured. The exam is passed. The conflict is resolved. But sometimes, the cup is not removed. Sometimes, things do not end as we might have prayed. Sometimes, the greatest comfort we can cling to is the fact that our God knows grief, because he gave up his one and only son to die, that Christ himself went to dark Gethsemane and knows the agony of suffering. There, in the garden, Jesus teaches us to pray, modeling for us what it means to be transparent and honest before the Father while continually submitting our will to his. While we do not always understand God's ways, and his will may seem hidden from us, like Hebrew boys in the furnace, we hold fast to the hope that God can deliver, and if he does not, we trust that he is still good (Daniel 3:16-18).

*"Go to dark Gethsemane, you who feel the tempter's power;
your Redeemer's conflict see; watch with Him one hour;
turn not from His griefs away; learn of Jesus Christ to pray."*



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Good Friday, April 19 | Luke 23:26-49 | Ben Winder

"The Dying Jesus"

This seems a short account of such a world changing event, and especially of one that has been the focus of much writing, countless songs, untold art, and deepest contemplation. As many Christians recite together each Sunday, even this coming high, holy Sunday of resurrection, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." Indeed, he did.

Jesus has died. Praise be to God this is not the end of the story, but it is an important part of the story we would do well to encounter as fully as possible.

As you read this gospel witness to Jesus' crucifixion this day, take careful note of all those who play small parts in it. The soldiers. Simon from Cyrene. The crowd. The wailing daughters of Jerusalem. The criminals crucified beside him. Those casting lots for his clothes. The watching people. The sneering leaders. The mocking soldiers. The praising centurion.

And there, in the middle of it all, the dying Jesus.

All those who knew him stood at a distance and watched.

Let it be for us, too. Let us stand at this distance of both geography and time, and take it all in.

As you do perhaps you might respond in prose or song or art or contemplation. Whatever it draws out of you, may it also draw you in. May you find your own place in this account of the Righteous One of God, crucified, dead, and buried.

Holy Saturday, April 20 | | Amy Hirsch | Luke 23:50-56

"Faithful Witnesses"

Today is known as "Holy Saturday" on the church calendar. Luke's text is mostly silent on this day, because it was the Jewish Sabbath (which began at Friday on sundown and ended at sundown on Saturday). In Matthew's gospel, we are told that on Saturday, the chief priests and Pharisees appeared before Pilate and requested that soldiers be placed in front of Jesus' tomb to secure it. Luke doesn't mention this detail, but instead he highlights several surprising witnesses to Jesus' burial, these faithful women from Galilee. It was customary for bodies to be anointed with spices and ointments at the time of burial, not to embalm the body but rather to help with the stench associated with decomposition. Because the Sabbath was approaching, the burial was hasty, so the women took note of where he was laid in preparation to return after the Sabbath, on Sunday, so that they might be able to care for his body.



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On that Holy Saturday, the text tells us “they rested according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56 ESV). From Jesus’ birth to his burial, Luke’s gospel reveals there were in fact Israelites who were faithful in the waiting, people who, like Simeon, Anna, Elizabeth, and Zechariah, were “righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and the statutes of the Lord” (Luke 1:6 ESV), quietly waiting for the hope of the promised Messiah. Can you imagine the anguish these women felt as they watched their Savior be placed in a borrowed grave? Yet they determined they would quietly wait and walk in faithfulness.

Most of our lives are lived on Holy Saturday. We walk in the realization of Christ’s death, burial, and ascension, yes, and the truth that sin’s power over us has been broken through the blood of the cross; yet we still exist in a world where sin’s presence seems to taint everything. Like these women, we wait with eager longing for God to work in our lives, trusting that he is faithful, even when we can’t understand his plan. These women would experience the shock of their lives when they would return to the tomb that Sunday to learn of Christ’s resurrection. In the same way, the day will also come when we will experience that same resurrection power and be raised to life, given glorified bodies in Christ’s likeness, to live in a land where sin is no more. And on that day, we will be able to proclaim with all of the saints, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55 ESV). Until that day comes, we too are called to walk in that same quiet faithfulness that waits in hope for the Lord.

Sunday, April 21 | Luke 24:1-12 | Wayne Splawn

“An Ending They Did Not See Coming”

I enjoy watching movies with surprise endings. I love to watch a good story conclude in a way I never saw coming. The movie that I think most typifies this type of film is M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Sixth Sense*. I can remember being totally taken by surprise as the final scene of that movie played out on the screen before me. I will not ruin it for you in case you have not seen it, but suffice it to say that, at the end of the movie, the audience learns an important detail about the identity of one of the main characters that completely changes the meaning of everything that had happened throughout the entire movie. It is not until the end of the movie that one can look back and correctly understand what had been happening the whole time.

When you read Luke 24:1-12, it is apparent that Jesus’ followers experienced a similar feeling when they went to visit Jesus’ tomb. They were certain that Jesus had died on the cross and they made the trip to the tomb to make final preparations to Jesus’ body. However, when they arrived at the tomb, the stone that secured the entrance had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. As they are trying to understand what had happened to Jesus’ body, two angels appeared and told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead in fulfillment of what he had predicted throughout His ministry. The women then remembered what Jesus had said would happen and they ran to tell the other disciples what they had seen and heard from the angels. In the days that followed his resurrection, Jesus would appear to his disciples many times to prove that he was the Messiah who had indeed risen from the dead.



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The resurrection is an essential part of the gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, he has defeated sin, death, and hell and all who place their faith in him share in the salvation he has achieved on their behalf. Each of us will one day experience death if Jesus does not return first. However, if we are in him, we can face our death with the assurance that death will not be the last word for us. One day, the risen Jesus will return to this world and all who have died in Christ will be raised and given resurrection bodies and live with the Lord for all of eternity. If you are in Christ, rejoice today in the hope that is yours. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! If you have not yet received the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, then today God is calling you to repent of your sins, place your faith in Christ, and experience the eternal life that is available to all who trust in Jesus.