



**A Lenten Bible Reading Plan
for the Gospel of Luke**

March 6 - April 16, 2017

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



Luke

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the gospel of Luke during the season of Lent. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. The weekends are used as time to reflect on the passages of the previous week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Luke is first and foremost a gospel. The simplest meaning for gospel is "good news." The gospel of Luke is a testimony of good news - namely, the good news of Jesus! Luke writes so that Theophilus and other readers might have an accurate account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4).

There are some elements that distinguish the gospel of Luke from the other gospels. First, the gospel of Luke was written by Luke. Now, this isn't a surprise necessarily, but Luke was a Gentile physician. We don't have a lot of information about him but we do know that he was one of Paul's companions. He was also a Greek man who was well-educated and detailed - which comes through in his writing!

Second, Luke portrays the message of the gospel as a message of good news for all people. In Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:23-38), Luke traces the family history of Jesus all the way back - not just to David or to Abraham, but to Adam! Jesus is the Savior for all peoples - He has come to reconcile Jews and Gentiles to Himself. We see this theme highlighted in the gospel of Luke as Jesus reaches out to those who are marginalized and oppressed. In Luke 4, Christ declares that He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

But Jesus doesn't just come to bring economic peace or justice in this world only - Jesus comes so that, through His death on the cross, we might be made right with God. As we journey through the gospel of Luke during this season of Lent, I hope this powerful book will remind you of the good news that Christ has come to set you free from the bondage of sin. This is news that changes everything.



Luke

WEEK ONE: LUKE 1-4
MARCH 6-12

Monday, March 6 | Luke 1:1-38 | Doug Dortch

"An Orderly Account"

The gospel of Luke was the work of the only Gentile author in the Bible. Traditionally thought to be a physician (Colossians 4:14), Luke writes the Jesus story from the perspective of one who understands its relevance to people on the margins of society: the poor, the outcast, the barren, the feminine, and the non-Jew. Far from constructing simply a social statement, Luke offers the good news in this manner as a reminder that God's salvation through Jesus has a universal reach. No longer is anyone beyond the pale of salvation.

We see Luke's style in this opening chapter, where he begins with a Greek-style prologue that is different from the other gospels. Because he writes for a predominately Gentile audience, Luke wants them to know from the outset that his account is both reasonable and trustworthy.

From the prologue, Luke moves on to an account of Jesus' birth, which contains important chronological, political, and geographical notes. While Luke's occupation as a physician may be a topic of debate, no one can argue with how Luke was an able historian, as he situates Jesus' story in a manner that removes all mythological trappings, which one would expect to find in any other Greek narrative. Luke wants his readers to know that Jesus was a real person in a real place, though remarkably neither He nor the context of His birth would ever have given any indication of His true significance as the Son of God. Most people would expect the "Son of the Most High" to have come from royal roots, but Luke goes to great lengths to show Jesus' humble background, though the wise reader should be careful to note that such a background was a part of God's plan for our salvation from the very beginning.

Thus you have the detailed background of the birth of John the Baptist, with emphasis upon the faithfulness of his mother Elizabeth in contrast to the doubt of her husband Zechariah the priest, who is reprimanded by the angel Gabriel and is stricken mute, until he receives a second chance to show his faith. That same angel then appears to a virgin named Mary in the little backwoods town of Nazareth in order to announce to her that she is to be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and is to give birth to the "Son of the Most High." And in spite of the many questions this young virgin must have had, she accepts the responsibility, believing that "nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

As you read this gospel, allow that truth of God's possibilities to claim your heart. Instead of focusing on your limitations and inabilities, consider how God might bring something to pass through you as



Luke

you trust in Him to do the impossible. As this opening chapter reminds us, while there are countless reasons why we might think that we are unqualified to serve God's purposes, when His Spirit overshadows us, as it did both Elizabeth and Mary, we would be wise to acquiesce. Such faithfulness brings order to our otherwise disorderly lives and makes us eyewitnesses and living examples of what the power of the Holy Spirit can bring about through anyone who is willing and ready to become "the servant of the Lord" (Luke 1:38).

Tuesday, March 7 | Luke 1:39-80 | Doug Dortch

"Praise and Prophecy"

The accounts of Mary and Elizabeth, woven intricately together as they are, show the orderliness of God, who works in ways consistent with His covenant nature. God is not making things up as He goes along, but brings together circumstances in ways that fulfill ancient prophecies and provoke ecstatic praise.

For example, when Mary and her cousin Elizabeth come together to compare notes on their pregnancies, both are moved to praise God for His faithfulness to them, neither of whom considers herself to be worthy of such divine favor. Even Elizabeth's baby leaps inside of her as a symbol of the joy the birth of Jesus will bring. Mary's response to God's faithfulness brings the story of Jesus to a brief halt, as she offers a commentary on all that has taken place to this point, in a way that is reminiscent of Old Testament praise songs offered in response to God's work.

The story resumes with the birth of John the Baptist and, more importantly, his father Zechariah's second chance to respond to God's faithfulness with his own. When Zechariah acknowledges the name of his son in spite of the fact that the name conforms to no social expectations, the priest's voice is restored and he immediately breaks out in ecstatic prophecy.

Pay close attention to Zechariah's song. Notice the conflicting images of salvation it contains. The combination of the social, political, and spiritual themes is telling. It is Luke's way of telling us readers that the restoration of Israel is to be much more encompassing than anyone might have guessed, and a "light of salvation" to all who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death," which is to say both Jews and Gentiles.

These accounts and responses reflect the universal scope of God's salvation in Jesus. We sometimes get too provincial in our hopes and expectations so that our longing for God's appearance doesn't get much past our own stories. But when we see how our little stories connect with God's much larger



Luke

one, then we come to see the importance of uniting our hearts and voices with others so that every person might have the chance to hear and believe.

Wednesday, March 8 | Luke 2 | Doug Dortch

"Christmas at Lent"

I'm so glad we're revisiting this birth narrative from Luke's gospel at this season of the year. Certainly the story is one of the most cherished of stories we hear in the Christmas season, but sometimes I wonder if our inability to remove it from the context causes us to miss something of the full message it's intended to convey.

For example, when we take it out of the Christmas context, we're better able to see how Luke's account of the birth of Jesus reveals how God faithfully brings to fruition His promises to the lowliest of society and not the elite and the powerful. Moreover, the titles given to Jesus – "Savior and Lord" – are in direct opposition to the claims of the Roman Emperor and subvert his authority. Finally, God's revelation to these shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem and not to the connected crowd at the Jerusalem temple teaches us that God's meeting place can be everywhere and that the good news is ultimately for "all people" (Luke 2:10).

What follows the birth of Jesus is a combination of other events that reflect how the Holy Spirit is working in concert with Old Testament commandments in order to acclaim Jesus as the agent of God's salvation, which again has a universal reach. Two characters, Simeon and Anna, represent expectant, pious Israel, and connect God's purposes for restoring His people with His commitment to extend salvation to the Gentiles as well (Luke 2:32)! (Do you see a pattern here?)

The chapter concludes with Jesus' transition into adulthood, but with a clear indication of the manner in which His physical growth is matched by His spiritual piety. Most remarkable in this text is the fact that we are reminded that Jesus' father is God, and that Jesus from an early age confesses His desire to live a life of service to the redemptive purposes of God.

I always thought it would be nice to have known what transpired between Jesus' appearance in the temple at 12 years of age, and the beginning of his earthly ministry, around 30. But we don't have that information. Instead, we must go with what we do have, an account of the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth and the remarkable nature of Jesus' spiritual growth, and commit ourselves to being as open to God's Spirit as was He, so that regardless of our age, we might "increase in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).



Luke

Thursday, March 9 | Luke 3 | Doug Dortch

“All Flesh Shall See the Salvation of God”

As with the other gospels, Luke’s account contains the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, who comes announcing how “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6). Luke carefully connects what was anticipated of John in Luke 1, while emphasizing John’s role as paving the way for the emphasis in the gospel going forward to be exclusively on Jesus as the Son of God, empowered by God, and committed to being God’s agent of salvation.

John’s importance to Luke is evident by the impressive amount of space Luke dedicates to John’s ministry. John’s role is to provoke a crisis around the nature of what constitutes true faithfulness to God and by directing popular hopes for the coming Messiah toward Jesus. As he does so, John attracts hostility from the people, even as did the prophets before him.

As the people begin to see the light, however, John offers them instruction on how they are not to rely on their ancestral relationship to Abraham, but instead their spiritual lineage. When the people begin to wonder if perhaps John is the coming Messiah, he quickly deflects their attention by pointing out how the coming Messiah will provide a baptism of the Holy Spirit, which the astute reader will notice is also a signal theme of Jesus’ ministry for Luke.

This chapter ends with a genealogy, which serves three purposes: (1) it identifies Jesus as having achieved the age of public service (Luke 3:23); (2) it makes sure that the reader knows what characters in Luke’s story do not – that Jesus is God’s son, not Joseph’s (Luke 3:23); and (3) to designate how Jesus’ lineage goes back to Adam, an indication of how His birth serves God’s redemptive purposes for all creation.

We now begin to see in Luke’s gospel how the power of the Holy Spirit is meant to rest not only upon central figures in the story of salvation (Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Jesus), but also upon all who would open their hearts to the good news. Such openness is the only path to knowing that source of power that guides us in the face of life’s most challenging situations and enables us to overcome those times so that we might know the purpose for which we were created as descendants of Adam too.

Friday, March 10 | Luke 4:1-44 | Doug Dortch

“The Ministry Begins”

As Jesus ministry begins, the reader will notice that in spite of the prophecies regarding Jesus that Luke has mentioned, Jesus still must fully embrace His mission as the Son of God. This task is at the



Luke

center of the temptation story in Luke's gospel. Jesus' testing closely parallels the testing of Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 6-8), though Jesus passes His testing by reflecting a level of obedience that Israel was never quite able to give.

Once Jesus emerges from His time of temptation, the first phase of His public ministry begins with His activity in Galilee, His home region. Luke's gospel moves at this point from story to practice, with Jesus fulfilling God's mission through itinerant ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' first stop is His hometown of Nazareth. Borrowing from Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2, Jesus situates the character of His mission with the prophetic hope for the restoration of Israel. The immediate response of the people is positive, because they are proud of "Joseph's son" (Luke 4:22). It's only when Jesus clarifies His identity and the true nature of His universal ministry that the people turn on Him when they realize that His vision of God's kingdom is much larger and more encompassing than their vision.

Jesus' next stop is Capernaum, which is to become His "adopted" hometown after His rejection in Nazareth. There, Jesus encounters a demon, who recognizes Him as "the Holy One of God" (Luke 4:34). Jesus silences the demon because He has no desire for even true testimony to come from a false witness, and the effects of Jesus' work there add to His reputation and pave the way for even greater deeds.

When Jesus retreats to Simon's house, He has another opportunity to bring wholeness where brokenness exists. He first heals Simon's mother-in-law so that she can express her gratitude through hospitable service. Then others show up on Jesus' doorstep looking for Jesus to do in them what they are unable to do for themselves, which is the essence of salvation. As Jesus performs this deed of mercy, He announces for the first time in Luke's gospel the purpose of His ministry: to proclaim to "other cities also" the good news of the kingdom of God.

We all need some type of healing, which only Jesus can make possible. By recognizing Him for who He really is, the Son of God, we find the power we need not only to overcome our times of testing, but also to know the saving power of Jesus in ways that amaze us and make us whole.

Saturday, March 11-Sunday, March 12 | Luke 1-4

Reread Luke 1-4 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Luke

WEEK TWO: LUKE 5-8 MARCH 13-19

Monday, March 13 | Luke 5 | Wayne Splawn

“Who is Jesus?”

People have been debating the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” since Jesus walked the earth. Some think Jesus was a good person or a remarkable teacher. Others find His example of sacrifice worthy of emulation. Still others act as if Jesus is nothing more than a larger than life holy man from the first century whose reputation far exceeds the reality of who He was.

What did Jesus reveal about His identity?

In Luke 5:17-26, Jesus discloses an important aspect of His identity when He says, “Man, your sins are forgiven” to the paralytic man lying on a mat before Him. When the Pharisees hear Jesus say these words, they are outraged. They know that only God has authority to forgive sins and that Jesus has implicitly claimed to be God by telling the man his sins have been forgiven. Jesus doesn’t back away from His words. Instead, He tells those in attendance that He deliberately chose these words so they would understand that He has divine authority. Jesus is not merely a good teacher, ethical example, or spiritual guru. Jesus is God.

How do you answer the question, “Who is Jesus?”

Your first response to this question might be, “Of course Jesus is God!” However, I want to challenge you to consider whether your life bears witness to your belief in Jesus’ divinity. Do you submit yourself to Jesus’ teachings as if they are the commands of God or do you pick and choose what to obey as if Jesus were merely a human spiritual advisor? Do you hold the name of Jesus in high esteem and offer Him your absolute worship and devotion or are you prone to flippantly use Jesus’ name as if He were an imaginary figure from the past or a cultural relic? Our belief in the truth that Jesus is God must impact both our actions and our words.

Tuesday, March 14 | Luke 6 | Wayne Splawn

“The Way to Wisdom”

Luke 6 contains a consolidated section of Jesus’ teaching often referred to as the “Sermon on the Plain.” In this section of Scripture, Luke includes some of the teaching we also find in Matthew 5-7, a passage of Scripture commonly called “The Sermon on the Mount.” Throughout this extended block



Luke

of teaching in Luke, Jesus explains truths such as who is truly blessed in life, the importance of His followers loving their enemies, and the danger of rashly judging others. The teaching in Luke 6 is penetrating and profound.

Luke wraps up this section of Jesus' teaching by focusing on the importance of obedience. In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks the crowd, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I tell you?" For Jesus, it is nonsensical for people to call Him "Lord" without seeking to obey his teaching. Jesus then illustrates the importance of obedience by telling His listeners of two people who take contrasting approaches to life. Jesus likens the person who obeys His teaching to a person who wisely built his house on a rock-solid foundation. Conversely, Jesus compares the person who fails to obey with a man who built his house on the sand. When the storms of life came, the house built on the rock stands while the house built on the sand collapses. Jesus' point is clear: those who call Him "Lord" must obey His teaching if they want to experience a blessed life. To disobey is to court certain destruction.

Read back over Luke 6. Are you wisely conforming your life to Jesus' teaching? Notice, the question is not, "Are you obeying perfectly?" Each of us knows we are unable to flawlessly obey Jesus' teaching. We certainly need God's grace and mercy when we fall short. However, if our lives are constantly marked by disobedience and no genuine desire to conform our lives to Jesus' teaching, we must seriously reflect upon our confession that "Jesus is Lord." A faithful confession that "Jesus is Lord" must be accompanied by a desire to obey.

Wednesday, March 15 | Luke 7 | Wayne Splawn

"How Much Do You Owe?"

Have you ever found yourself between a rock and a hard place? Few things are as frightening or humbling as being in a situation where you know you do not have the resources required to meet the challenge at hand.

In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus is having dinner at a Pharisee's home when a sinful woman enters carrying an alabaster flask of ointment. The lady proceeds to wash Jesus' feet with her tears and even goes so far as kissing Jesus' feet. The Pharisee who had invited Jesus into his home questions Jesus' identity because Jesus allows the woman to touch Him in this way. He concludes that a true prophet would have known the lady was a sinner and would ask her to keep her distance.

Jesus uses this event as an opportunity to teach Simon an important lesson about forgiveness and love. He tells Simon a story about two people who owed a moneylender money. One owed an



Luke

astronomical amount while the other owed a relatively small sum. The moneylender forgave both of their debts. Jesus then asks Simon, "Now which of them will love [the moneylender] more?" Simon correctly answers that the one who was forgiven the larger debt will love the moneylender more.

This passage is a powerful reminder of the importance of recognizing how much we need God's grace. Apart from an understanding of the enormous debt we owe God because of our sin, we will be self-righteous people who struggle to love God with our whole hearts or extend grace and mercy. However, if we believe that Jesus paid an insurmountable debt for us on the cross, our love for God will be great and our desire to extend grace and mercy to others will continually grow. How much do you owe God?

Thursday, March 16 | Luke 8:1-21 | Wayne Splawn

"Too Busy to Bear Fruit"

I used to do yard work for my grandmother when I was in middle school and high school. I usually loved working for her because she would always feed me well and pay me way too much for the work I completed. The only task I disliked was pulling weeds out of her flower beds. There was no easy way to get the job done. I had to spend hours hunched over on my knees, patiently making my way through the flower bed while pulling out weeds that threatened to rob the flowers of much-needed nutrients in the soil. To have the beautiful flowers she desired, the weeds had to go!

The Parable of the Sower is one of Jesus' most well-known parables. Over the years, I have been especially challenged by Jesus' description of the seed that fell among the thorns. In Luke 8:14-15, Jesus explains that the seed that fell among the thorns represents people who hear the word, but fail to produce fruit for the kingdom of God because the word is choked out by "...the cares and riches and pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14).

One thing most everyone I know has in common is that they are way too busy. Between work, shuttling kids to and from school and sports, chores around the house that demand attention, and the occasional out-of-town trip, most of us feel as if every minute of every day is filled with activity. We often are so consumed with these things in fact that we have little time left over to invest in the things of the Lord. The cares and riches and pleasures of life often choke out God's word and we fail to bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

How do we start to make room for God's word so that we might begin to bear more fruit? We must engage in the difficult task of removing the weeds. Take some time this week to reflect on your life and ask the Lord to show you things that need to be removed to make room for God's word. Removing things from your schedule will not be easy and will certainly require you to make some hard choices.



Luke

However, in the end the work will be well worth the effort if you are freed up to make a greater investment in the eternal things of God. You don't want to get to the end of your life and discover that you were so consumed with the things of this world that you were too busy to bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

Friday, March 17 | Luke 8:22-56 | Wayne Splawn

“Declare What God Has Done”

One of the thumbnail proposals that is a part of our church's vision is: “We share Christ.” Many people find it challenging to share Christ with others in the places where they live, work, and play. One reason we sometimes struggle to share Christ is we are not sure what to say.

In Luke 8:26-29, Luke records a miracle Jesus performed in the life of a demon-possessed man. Following his miraculous healing, the man begs Jesus to allow him to go with Him when He prepares to leave the region. Jesus denies his request. Rather than going with Him, Jesus gives the man another mission. What is the mission? In Luke 8:39 Jesus tells the man, “Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.” Jesus does not give him a complicated message that would require years of seminary training. Instead, the man is simply tasked with telling others of what God had done for him.

As you think about your own efforts to share Christ with others, this might be a helpful model for you to employ in your life. Spend some time today considering all that God has done for you. How have you seen Him at work? In what ways have you experienced His faithfulness? How did you come to know Christ and what difference has knowing Jesus made in your life? Make a list of these things and then pray for God to give you opportunities to declare what He has done for you. As Dr. Dortch reminded each of us in a recent sermon, we are not responsible for the outcome of our efforts to share Christ - all we can do is be faithful to have conversations with others. Like the man in Luke 8, go and declare what God has done for you and trust Him with the results.

Saturday, March 18-Sunday, March 19 | Luke 5-8

Reread Luke 5-8 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Luke

WEEK THREE: LUKE 9-12 MARCH 20-26

Monday, March 20 | Luke 9:1-17 | Elizabeth Helms

"The Feast That's About More Than Fish"

If you've ever attended our church's annual Thanksgiving lunch, you know what it means to eat and be satisfied (Luke 9:17). And you also know what it is like to share a meal with almost 500 people! Now imagine that multiplied ten times over and that would be the experience of feeding 5,000 people on a remote mountainside in Galilee. I can still picture the felt cutouts of loaves and fish that were used in my Sunday School classes as a child to illustrate this story. However, often what was missing is how this story connected to the larger story of God's redemptive plan and the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The disciples come to Jesus with only a few loaves and a few fish, nothing near what is needed to accomplish the task at hand. But here we see that Christ is able to take what is totally inadequate and create something abundant. And aren't we thankful that God graciously chooses to use inadequate people to accomplish His purposes? I am. If we were looking for the adequately qualified people to be used by God, none would be found at Mountain Brook Baptist Church. It is only because we are given Christ's righteousness that we can be found right in the eyes of the Lord.

This episode is revealing who Christ is. He is the long-awaited Messiah. After this miracle we see Peter's confession of Jesus' identity. Peter proclaims that Jesus is "the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). He is the Messiah. He is the long-awaited Son who came to seek and to save, to heal and to bring hope. Because Jesus Christ came to earth in the incarnation, lived a sinless life, died a sinner's death in our place, rose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of God the Father, we have hope. We have hope that one day we will share a meal not just with 500 people in the gym, and not with 5,000 on a mountainside, but with a great multitude from every tribe and tongue at the heavenly banquet. We look to that banquet with hope. On that day, gathered at that table, we will join our voices with our brothers and sisters around the throne and sing the words of Revelation 19:6: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns."



Luke

Tuesday, March 21 | Luke 9:18-62 | Elizabeth Helms

“The Real ‘Transformation Tuesday’”

The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus has recently become one of my very favorite portions of Scripture. Why? Because it is where we are given a glimpse of Jesus’ heavenly glory!

Jesus takes His inner circle of Peter, James, and John on a journey with Him to the top of a high mountain. There they have the privilege to witness something that in the moment they cannot even begin to comprehend. This man that they have been following around and learning from for three years is suddenly transformed. He is radiant. His skin is glowing. His clothes are described as whiter than snow! Can you imagine the beauty of this scene? The visible transformation of Jesus that is witnessed by His disciples is not a manifestation of something that wasn’t there before; it is a revelation of what has always been. One commentator said that the dullness of Jesus’ earthly condition was temporarily stripped away, and the true nature of Christ could for once be seen. Jesus’s transformation was the outward expression of His heavenly reality.

The truly incredible aspect of this passage is that the very same power that transforms Jesus’ outward appearance is at work within you and me. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that is inwardly transforming us more and more into His glorious image. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that those who are in Christ “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” We are being transformed! By the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling with us, we are made more into the radiant image of Christ.

This is what we call sanctification. By the work of the Spirit, the sin in us is burned up and we become more and more like Christ. Today, as you read this passage, marvel that the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. One day our faith will be made sight and we will see Him face to face! As we wait for that day, ask God to do the painful work of killing all that is sinful within you so that the image of Christ may become ever more evident and beautiful.

Wednesday, March 22 | Luke 10 | Mary Splawn

“Remembering Divine Moments”

If you have a “red letter Bible,” you’re noticing lots of red as you read Luke 10 today. Get ready for lots of continuous speech from Jesus in the next chapters as well. Even as I contemplate the fact that we have so many recorded words of our Savior, I find reason for rejoicing and praise. Isn’t it wonderful that God has given us such a wonderful record of Jesus’ life and speech!



Luke

One reason I am grateful is because I cherish anything that hints of a memory or a record of the past. Recently, I enjoyed looking through old calendars where my husband's 93-year-old grandmother had written notes about the past. Below are a sampling of my finds. I'm guessing at the dates because I don't have the calendar, but you'll get the gist!

Jan. 2006: Warmest January on record in South Carolina

Jan 6, 2008: Wayne down in the back

Jan. 13, 2008: Still bent over

Feb. 21 2009: Wayne and Mary called on my birthday

Sept. 20, 2010: Sat in car with kids while Debbie got hair done

Feb. 23, 2011: Makayla was baptized today

Aug. 12, 2012: Big storm while we were at church and they took us to Senior Center for safety

Dec. 2, 2012: No one came by to visit

To someone who doesn't know Mema, the calendars with notes might seem boring or irrelevant, but I wanted to read every word. As I read mostly about the mundane ins and outs of life, I savored the scribbled notes because they sparked memories of one I love so much. These notes remind me of her personality and what matters to her.

Reading these notes brought on a certain sadness of time gone by. But, they also brought up a well of desire; a yearning to remember that all moments are divine moments - moments where God is present and working in and through us for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom.

In this passage, Jesus tells the disciples that they are blessed because they were physically near Jesus. Verses 23-24 say, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

Perhaps the disciples couldn't grasp how wonderful the days were; days where they were blessed beyond measure to see and hear the One who saw Satan fall from heaven (Luke 10:18)! In other words, maybe they were missing the grandeur of the Eternal and Almighty God who was in their midst; the one who from generation to generation, people have longed to see and hear! Perhaps they couldn't see that their moments were divine moments.

We also struggle with this problem. Often we can't comprehend the presence of the Holy One in our lives. Maybe we don't hear His audible voice and we don't see His physical body, but we can hear His recorded words in the red letters of Scripture and we can see His hand working in the world around us. But, are we too distracted to reflect or recognize?



Luke

Today, let's take a deep breath and reread Jesus' words to us. Let's remember that as followers of Christ, we have been promised that Christ's Spirit is present with us. Let's take a fine tooth comb and look within the wonderful words and memories about Jesus that are collected for us. Then, watch for Him to work, even in the mundane today.

Activity: Find a pocket calendar (or your phone will do!) and make note of one thing you see God working in today. Add notes each day. Read back over your notes periodically. These memories will serve you well and will help you to remember that God is present with you every day, whatever you may face and wherever you may go.

Thursday, March 23 | Luke 11 | Mary Splawn

"We Need Prayer Like We Need Air"

My four-year-old daughter Eleanor Grace has been learning the Lord's Prayer. She has it pretty much memorized, except for a few misspeaks. One of her errors is to substitute the word "our" for "your" so the first part goes something like this: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, OUR kingdom come, OUR will be done..."

While Eleanor doesn't have a firm grasp on the meaning of the prayer just yet, she is actually speaking what we sometimes want prayer to be; i.e. God doing what we want! And, doesn't Jesus even say that you should "ask and it will be given to you" (Luke 11:9)?

Yes, prayer does include asking God for what we want but a closer look here in Luke 11 reminds us that one of the things we should really want is more awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in and around us. See verse 13: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Prayer is an opportunity to realign what we want with what God wants, as we become more in-tune with His Spirit. Prayer is also our way of saying we want closeness with God and our recognition that we are helpless without the Lord! Like Adam and Eve in the Garden after they sinned, our tendency is to shy away from God, but Jesus teaches us to run toward Him with persistence and boldness.

This week, let's take God at His Word. Let's ask Him for an outpouring of the work of His Spirit in and around us. As we pray, let us remember that we are helpless to forgive ourselves, we are constantly in need of God's provision, and we are desperate for His wisdom in the face of temptation. Without the leadership of our holy Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we will



Luke

naturally desire “our kingdom come.” Help us Lord to throne you as King of our lives and to commune with you as Father and King.

Activity: Think of your devotional time as having a conversation with God. As you read a passage of Scripture, remember that God is speaking to you. Think of prayer as your response to what God has said in His Word. Use the passage as a springboard into prayer and respond to what God has said. As you converse with the Lord, ask Him to teach you how His word is practical to your life today.

Friday, March 24 | Luke 12 | Mary Splawn

“Whose Name is on the Kingdom?”

A song that we play often in our car on the way to school is “First” by Lauren Daigle. The bridge says, “You are my treasure and my reward, Let nothing ever come before I seek You.” The song was written to encourage believers to reorient our lives around God and His kingdom instead of ourselves and our kingdom.

Just as the passage reminds us in Luke 12:22-34, it is God’s good pleasure to provide for us. When we spend our days worrying about what we’ll eat or wear, we are missing the opportunity to trust. When we continually fixate on things that are temporary, our view of eternity is diminished!

Honestly, most of us don’t have to worry about filling our stomachs or finding something to wear. We have fully bellies and closets packed with clothes. We have what are called “first world problems” like “I don’t want to eat that because I had it yesterday,” or “I need some new clothes, because mine aren’t so stylish anymore.” We battle with the desire for more and better and the money we amass goes toward many of these things.

And, though it doesn’t feel so dirty, it is sinful when we continue to seek after providing more for ourselves, our comfort, and entertainment at the expense of helping others.

Jesus’ statement in verse 33 requires us to stop and ponder kingdom economics. He says, “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.” Ouch!!! Jesus begs us to ask the question, “How does our wealth lead to greed, arrogance and self-sufficiency? How could we do less for us and more for the kingdom?”

Jen Wilkin in her book *None Like Him* discusses how we use our wealth, power, beauty, and charisma to influence and control. In regards to wealth, she says, “Regardless of how much money we have



Luke

been given to steward, for the Christian, the question must always be, 'Do I control the money or does the money control me?' A believer who is unable to give liberally to those in need reveals that she has lost control of her role to steward the wealth entrusted to her. Those of us who have been given more than our daily bread must turn our eyes to those who are still waiting to receive theirs."

We must remember that the kingdom we're seeking doesn't have our name on it. Lord, help us to see You as the treasure and live in a way that pursues You wholeheartedly.

Activity: Today, give yourself the ten year test. What material thing are you anxious about today? Ask yourself, "Will I be worried about this in ten years?" If not, stop and pray that God would reorient your life around His kingdom and to help you not care about the things of this world that in the end won't matter at all.

Saturday, March 25-Sunday, March 26 | Luke 9-12

Reread Luke 9-12 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Luke

WEEK FOUR: LUKE 13-17 MARCH 27 - APRIL 2

Monday, March 27 | Luke 13 | Kely Hatley

"Jesus, the Compassionate Gardener"

In Luke 13:6-9 we read the parable of the barren fig tree. In this story, there are three main characters: the vineyard owner, the gardener of the vineyard, and the fig tree itself. The owner has had patience to wait for three years but the tree has never produced figs. In his frustration, he orders the gardener to cut the tree down because it is a waste of soil space. Yet the gardener intercedes on the behalf of the fig tree asking the owner to give the tree one more year so that he, the gardener, could work the soil around the tree, fertilize it, and pay attention to it hoping that it will finally produce fruit. The owner relents granting the extra year of growth with the stipulation that if the tree does not produce fruit the next year that it must be cut down.

We don't know what happened to the tree, but the tree's outcome is not the point of the parable. Most people believe that the owner represents God, the gardener represents Jesus, and the fig tree is a depiction of ourselves. The lesson is that God is a patient God, but God does not have unlimited patience. The owner in the story granted the tree three years to produce fruit. Some say the three year period in the story is significant because it represents the three years that both John the Baptist and Jesus had spent preaching repentance to the Jews. In Luke 3:8-9 we find John preaching to the Jewish people, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

John was already warning about being a "barren tree." This parable does seem to connect well to His sermon already being preached. However, the gardener has compassion on the tree and asks for extra time. Jesus is always pursuing us, just as the good shepherd who left his ninety-nine sheep in their fold to go and look for the lost one. While God is patient, the story shows that His patience is not without limit. In this Lenten season, remember the way we started on Ash Wednesday reading from Joel 2:12-13: "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity." Make good use of the time you have today.



Luke

Tuesday, March 28 | Luke 14 | Kely Hatley

“ Have You Responded to Your Christly Invitation?”

Today's parable is a hard one found in verses 15-24. The story is of a master who prepares a great banquet feast and invites his first guests. When the guests are told the banquet is ready they reply with feeble excuses as to why each is unable to attend. Hearing these excuses, the master becomes angry and tells his servant to go out and bring in the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. The servant does so but there is still room at the table so the master commands the servant to go further out and bring all that would come in to the feast. The harsh ending of the parable tells the master's final words saying, “I tell you not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.” The men referred to were the initial guests invited.

Jesus told this parable in the context of a dinner he was attending being given by a prominent Pharisee. Jesus engaged the guests by asking them if it was lawful to heal someone on the Sabbath, and by lecturing them on their pride and self-serving tendencies. One guest spoke out and said, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” It is thought that perhaps the man spoke up to reference the fact that only Jews would be part of that heavenly banquet. Upon hearing him, Jesus told the parable of the banquet. The story certainly debunks the notion that only Jews will be allowed at the banquet feast!

In the story, the master represents God. Jesus represents the servant sent out to gather the guests. The invited guests of the banquet are the Jewish nation. When Jesus was sent to His own, in John 1:11 we read, “He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.” This is represented in the story by the first guests who rejected their invitation. When the servant was then sent out to gather in the poor, crippled, blind, and lame, this represents those who were the lowest and most undesirable among the Jews. They were welcome at the Lord's table and they responded to the invitation. Yet, there was still room. When the servant expands his reach to even more invitations, it shows that God is not satisfied with a half-empty table: Jesus also comes to call Gentiles to faith. Thanks be to God for the message from 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

We have all been invited to the “heavenly banquet” being in relationship to Jesus. Don't neglect your invitation and commit the sin of rejection that the first guests committed. During your Lenten walk to the cross, RSVP today by trusting your heart and life to Jesus forever!



Luke

Wednesday, March 29 | Luke 15 | Kely Hatley

“A Lost Item...Found!”

Luke 15 finds a telling of three parables and the subject is all the same....something valued was lost but was found in the end. Of the three parables found in this chapter, the most well-known and loved is most likely the story of the prodigal (or the lost) son. The second most familiar parable is the one of the lost sheep and the shepherd who sets out to find it. We hear much about these two stories Jesus told. Yet, while I have heard sermons and participated in studies about the last parable, that of the lost coin, I haven't heard this one talked about nearly as much as the other two. Therefore we will look at this parable today.

The woman has ten coins (and in my Bible's notes it states that their value is estimated to have been a full day's wage). She loses one of them and because of its value, immediately she begins to search for it. She lights a lamp, sweeps the floor, and looks carefully. What strikes me most is the fact that when the coin is lost that the woman values the coin so much that she uses every tool that she has available to search for it. The Bible does not say whether it was night or not, but it does indicate that the environment was dark enough to warrant using a lighted lamp for a search. She also sweeps with her broom to make sure that she gets into every nook and cranny leaving no place untouched in her search for the coin. Her attention and diligence in the search should come as a comfort to us.

The woman in the story represents Jesus to us. We are the lost coin. Notice something very important about the coin....it did not ask to be found. Now I know that an inanimate object is incapable of such an action, but it is still true that it did not do anything to help in the search. It mattered not to the coin that it was not part of the group. The woman did not allow the coin's silence to keep her from searching nor did its inaction discourage her from looking. No, she proactively lit her lamp, swept her floor, and searched with all her might to find it. Is this also not how Jesus pursues us? Philippians 1:6 says, "...being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God has initiated His work begun in us. He will complete it.

The coin being found represents God's work begun in us. He is faithful. He will complete that work. And the rejoicing that results from our return to Him from our lost state is and will continue to be a great reminder of how much He loves each of us. God pursues us not because of our worth to Him, but because of His faithful nature and how much He loves us. Thanks be to God!



Luke

Thursday, March 30 | Luke 16 | Kely Hatley

"A Lesson on Merciful, Generous Living"

The example story of the rich man and Lazarus is one of the most famous stories of Jesus' teachings. Art work has been crafted depicting the story, and famed African-American choral composer Jester Hairston composed a spiritual for choirs about it titled, "Poor Man Lazarus." Many people think that this story is just about money, but consider that it is more about how we live in relationship to others.

Think of how the rich man lived. Scripture says he was "dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day." On the contrary, Lazarus was a beggar who sat the rich man's gate. Lazarus was covered in sores and longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. The rich man ultimately ignored Lazarus and therefore received his due punishment in his death by going to hell to be in eternal torment. Lazarus also died, but we read where the angels carried him to Abraham's side. Abraham's side in the story represents eternal blessing and joy. Each character has gone to his permanent destination, one that money cannot buy nor lack of money keep one from obtaining it. There is a dramatic role reversal here. The rich man, who in life had everything but only used his wealth for his own well-being and self-indulgence, was now poor in eternity spending his time in torment and separation from God. Lazarus, who was poor and dejected in life, was now lifted up to be in paradise for eternity.

There are so many lessons in this story that we cannot explore them all in this short space. But one lesson here resonates with me: how we relate to others. Notice that even in eternal torment the rich man still treats Lazarus as his social inferior by asking Abraham to send Lazarus down to him with a drop of water to ease his suffering. I find this disturbing. While we think the rich man has learned his lesson due to his eternal punishment, he is still missing the mark by trying to use Lazarus to get what he wanted.

Remember also Jesus' words about the greatest commandment? In Matthew 22:36-39 we read, "'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Looking at this story through the lens of the second greatest commandment exposes the rich man's lack in this area as he ignored the immense suffering of Lazarus outside his home day after day. It shows us that it matters how we treat others. Let us remember the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi: "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to



Luke

console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.”

Friday, March 31 | Luke 17 | Kely Hatley

“Our God of Second Chances...Thanks Be to God!”

As we round out this week’s devotions we end with Luke 17. For today’s focus we will look mostly at verses 3-4. Jesus has just talked to the disciples about watching out for themselves lest they become a stumbling block to others and cause them to sin. Following that Jesus states, “So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

This passage is a comforting one for me. Remember what the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome about himself? Romans 7:15-19 says, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”

I suspect that if we are all honest, we find ourselves in the same row of seats as Paul on this topic. I know that I have wrestled many times (and I’m sure will continue to do so as long as I live) with how I cannot be consistent in doing what is good all the time. The good news for all of us is that God forgives us. Jesus is speaking to His disciples when He says in Luke 17:4 today that we must forgive those who sin against us each time that person comes to us and professes repentance. What a beautiful thing to see those words coming straight from our Savior! It shows us that we can know that God will deal with us in the same manner. I am so thankful that God doesn’t have a quota limit on His grace and forgiveness. While we should not willingly impose on His mercy, it is good to know that God will forgive us. In 1 John 1:9 we are told, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Thanks be to God for that promise, and thanks be to God for His merciful and marvelous second chances. As you continue your Lenten pilgrimage toward Easter, take time to give thanks to the Lord for His forgiveness as well as the peace that it brings to your life.

Saturday, April 1 - Sunday, April 2 | Luke 13-17

Reread Luke 13-17 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Luke

WEEK FIVE: LUKE 18-21 APRIL 3-9

Monday, April 3 | Luke 18 | Amy Jackson

Honestly, parts of Luke 18 are pretty discouraging. We meet several characters who fail to understand Christ's character and mission. They seem so close to the truth - after all, Christ stood before many of them in the flesh - but there is a failure to see who He is and what He has come to do. The Pharisee's self-righteous prayer shows that he can't see his own sinful pride. The rich ruler walks away from Christ, grieved over making a choice between his wealth and the kingdom. And even the disciples are frustrating in this chapter! They rebuke the children for coming to Christ. And when Jesus clearly shares His mission with them, they still don't seem to get it. They don't understand that He is on His way to Jerusalem, where He will be beaten and killed, and after three days He will be raised to life. He speaks clearly, but they don't grasp what He is saying. The disciples were expecting a king to lead them to victory over Rome, not a Messiah who would come to suffer and die.

Yet we also have a glimpse of hope in Luke 18. The hopeful irony is that the person who recognizes Jesus for who He is happens to be a man experiencing physical blindness. As Christ and the disciples approach Jericho, this man gets wind of Jesus' arrival and cries out to Him, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Despite being rebuked, he continues to call out until Christ acknowledges him. Jesus recognizes his faith and grants him healing. His physical sight now matches his spiritual vision - he can see the Christ in whom he had already put his faith!

Yet there's hope for us too in Luke 18 - the hope of putting our faith and trust in Christ. Before salvation, we are lost and blind, dead in our sins and without hope. We are like the self-righteous Pharisees who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt" (Luke 18:9). We are like the young ruler, who finds his worth and status in the created rather than the Creator. We are the disciples, who expect a different kind of messiah than the One who shows up. But the hope of the gospel is that when we truly encounter Christ for who He is, we are forever changed. We sing along with the redeemed of the ages the very words that John Newton penned so long ago: "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see." We too were once blind and lost in our sins, but when we experience Christ, like the blind man, we are forever changed.

Tuesday, April 4 | Luke 19:1-27 | Amy Jackson

Sometimes parables can make us uncomfortable. Maybe you squirmed in your chair this morning as you read the parable of the ten minas. I squirmed a bit when I thought about writing on it! On a first reading, it might seem like a parable antithetical to everything Christ has been saying about works and salvation - namely, that we don't earn our salvation through our good works or righteousness but are granted salvation on the basis of Christ's goodness and His righteousness. So why do we have these guys working and investing their money and being praised for their returns?



Luke

One of the beauties of parables is that there often isn't a one-for-one correlation in what is happening. A parable is a story designed to illustrate a point about the kingdom of God. And the point here is that faithfulness matters. We are all accountable for how we respond to the King, called to respond to Christ in faithfulness while we wait for Him to return, to "engage in business until [He] comes" (Luke 19:14). Certainly we don't earn our salvation by our works, but those who have been transformed by the power of the gospel are called to live out that transformation. What does it mean for me to be about my Master's business today, while I wait for Him to return? In what areas of my life might I be hiding my minas, rather than using my talents and gifts to serve Him and make Him known?

The story that Jesus tells us is about His kingdom, in a way, but it also points back to another kingdom familiar to the Israelites: the kingdom of Archelaus, Herod's son. When Archelaus went to Rome to confirm his kingship, some people responded in rebellion. When he returned, they were judged for their insubordination. The same is true for those who respond to Christ by rejecting Him. They will face certain judgment when He finally returns (Luke 19:27). Faithfulness matters. Luke has been reminding us, over and over, of the faithful love of Jesus - how He loves His children well, and how that love is poured out on even the outcasts of society. Christ brings those who are far off, like Zacchaeus, near to Him. That faithful love ought to stir our hearts to a response of worship and gratitude as we wait for Him to return again.

Wednesday, April 5 | Luke 19:28-48 | Amy Jackson

You never figure out a person all at once. That's true in human relationships, but it's also the case for us as we read books. Authors develop characters over time, and we get glimpses of who they are as the plots thicken. And yet there's usually a moment of clarity, when we see a person's heart shining through.

We have this kind of moment in Luke 19:41-44, where Luke pulls back the curtains to give us an intimate peek into Christ's heart. We begin the scene in verse 28 with Jesus entering Jerusalem and being praised by His followers. Then we have this poignant picture of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. Jesus cried out for a city that had been waiting for a Savior. The irony here is that while Jerusalem had been waiting and longing for her Savior, she had rejected the Messiah God sent, the One who came to bring her the peace she so desperately craved.

What is peace? Perhaps most of Jerusalem missed Christ's coming because they were looking for a different kind of peace. Jesus didn't come to bring peace with Roman authorities or the Jewish leadership. He didn't come to bring individualistic peace or self-fulfillment or happiness. Instead, the cry of Christ's heart is that we might have peace with God, a peace that encompasses everything about who we are and changes our reality completely.



Luke

In this passage, Christ is moved with compassion for His people, and He cries out in the same vein as the prophets of old sent by the Father, calling His people to repentance and faith before they face God's judgment for sin. He prophesies that Jerusalem will be judged for her rejection, a prophecy which is fulfilled in 70 AD when the city is destroyed under Rome.

I've been thinking a lot about peace recently. I had a few sleepless nights, where I found myself tossing and turning in bed, feeling restless and consumed with worry. This passage reminded me that, while there are concerns in the world, Christ is the One who has come to give us peace. And the greatest peace we can have rests in the knowledge that we are forgiven of our sins and made right with the Father through the work of the cross! That reality ought to transform everything. *Lord, help us to recognize the peace that You bring and to rest in that peace. Help us make Your peace known to those who do not believe, that they might also be made right with God.*

Thursday, April 6 | Luke 20 | Amy Jackson

Some moments define our relationships with others. We have to wonder if Jesus cleansing the temple was the final nail in the coffin for the religious leaders; after this, their relationship with Christ takes a turn for the worst. They challenge His authority, and in response, Jesus tells the people a story eerily similar to the situation at hand (Luke 20:9-18).

Jesus tells a parable about an owner who rents tenants a portion of his vineyard for farming. The problem is that, when the owner sends representatives to gather payment, the tenants refuse to pay. Instead of giving what is owed, they respond in violence, beating the servants and sending them away with nothing. The owner shows his mercy by sending his son to collect the payment, thinking that surely they will respect him! However, the wicked tenants see this as their chance to seize ownership of the land; after all, if the owner is without an heir, perhaps the land might pass to them! They throw the son, the owner's only beloved son, out of the vineyard and murder him.

At this point as we hear the story, we're outraged at this wickedness! Now, the religious leaders were also outraged when they heard the story - but for a different reason. They realized Jesus was telling a parable illustrating a point about Israel - and, a point about them specifically. God's people, including the religious leaders, had rejected His prophets. And now, in His gracious mercy, God has sent His own son as His ambassador to call God's people back to Himself. But the religious leaders refuse to accept His authority. In fact, like the wicked tenants, they too will soon plot murder - the murder of Jesus, God's beloved son!

There's so much we could say about this parable. First, this story shows us the spiritual blindness that has overwhelmed the religious leaders. The ones who had studied Scripture and should have recognized Christ for who He was - the promised Messiah from prophecies of old - instead have



Luke

rejected Him entirely. The kingdom will be handed over to others who believe - to the apostles and ultimately to the Gentiles who come to faith.

But this passage isn't just calling for a response from the religious leaders. Jesus continues to make these absolute claims about who He is. How we respond to Him doesn't change who He is - He is still God's chosen son, whether or not we choose to accept Him. Either we will be like the religious leaders, who reject Christ and are ultimately punished (see Luke 20:18), or we will choose to build our lives on Christ as the sure cornerstone.

Friday, April 7 | Luke 21 | Amy Jackson

To be honest, most of Luke 21 is pretty negative. Jesus paints a picture of what life will be like before He returns, and it's not pretty. Jesus gives grim news: Jerusalem will fall, wars will erupt, famine and disease will overtake the earth, false prophets will deceive people, and persecution will be inevitable for many Christians.

I think the verses on persecution are hard for us to hear (Luke 21:10-19), because we don't live in a world where we face the threat of death on a daily basis because of our faith. Yet we know that there are places where this is a reality - where Christians can't meet or share the gospel without fear, where choosing to follow Christ means death. And these words weren't so far removed for the disciples either. The book of Acts shows this prophecy coming to life. The Jewish religious leaders persecuted those who chose to break away from their faith and follow Christ as the true Messiah and son of God, handing them over to the cruel hands of Rome. Families were divided by the kingdom. Some lost their lives because of their faith. We are reminded yet again that the message of the cross is offensive for those who do not believe.

Yet the good news is that Jesus promises He will not abandon us, even in the midst of great opposition. He promises to speak through believers and to give us the words we ought to say in the midst of attack. He also promises that, through persecution, we have opportunities for witness. (I think a great example of this is Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7.) Now, Jesus never promises that Christians will be delivered from struggles on this side of eternity. But He does promise us that we can trust God with our whole lives - we have eternal security in Him, regardless of what we may face in this world.

What is our response to this news? First, I was convicted as I thought about the pain and suffering others face for their faith. I want to commit to praying more for believers who are persecuted throughout the world - to pray that, through suffering, they will have opportunities for gospel witness and that the Lord would give them endurance for the long road ahead. I was also encouraged by the reminder that God holds all things in His hands. Not a hair on our heads can be touched (Luke 21:18). Our bodies may break and fail, but our souls are held by God. No matter what we face - whether



Luke

persecution, disease, famine, or opposition - we can trust in the God who promises He will never leave and never forsake us.

Saturday, April 8-Sunday, April 9 | Luke 18-21

Reread Luke 18-21 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Luke

WEEK SIX: LUKE 22-24 APRIL 10-16

Monday, April 10 | Luke 22:1-38 | Hayden Walker

When you host a holiday or an event in your home, there are many things that you must do to prepare for the occasion. Perhaps you have even begun to make such preparations for Easter Sunday. Holiday meals require special care and attention in our traditions. Likewise, for the Jews of Jesus' day, the observation of the Passover meal required close attention to detail and careful preparation.

In verses 7-13, various forms of the word "prepare" occur four times. The disciples were instructed to prepare a Passover meal to share with Jesus. They must have spent time gathering the proper herbs, making the unleavened bread, and preparing the lamb for their meal.

They worked to celebrate the deliverance of Israel from Egypt by the blood of lambs. However, a greater deliverance was coming for them, the deliverance from sin and death. While they prepared the lamb to eat, the Lamb of God was preparing them for trial and temptation. The disciples must have felt that they were the ones preparing the Passover, however they were actually the ones being prepared by the true Passover Lamb.

As you live in the rhythms of Holy Week, consider how God may be preparing your heart for the truth of the gospel, to remain faithful to Him in all things.

Tuesday, April 11 | Luke 22:39-71 | Hayden Walker

A couple of months ago, the youth of our church went on a retreat. We journeyed to Shocco Springs in Talladega for a weekend of worship, discipleship, fellowship, and fun. Before we left, students were instructed to turn off their cell phones or leave them at home. We desired the weekend to be free from distractions, so that students might be able to focus more clearly on God. They needed a retreat.

After the Passover meal, Jesus retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane. He took His closest friends with Him to the garden, but even Jesus withdrew from their presence to pray alone (Luke 22:41). As He prayed, an angel came and strengthened Him. Though the task before Him was unimaginable, the Father granted Jesus the strength to endure the cross. The time of retreat and prayer was essential to His preparation.

Have you felt distracted lately? Consumed by activity or burdens? Perhaps you feel weary and tired. Though your schedule may stay busy, rest can be found through prayer and retreat. Prayer is where we experience the personal ministry of the Trinity: addressing the Father, through the righteousness of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. During this Holy Week, may you find time to retreat and pray as Jesus did. It is through these practices that God has provided a way for us to receive strength from heaven.



Luke

Wednesday, April 12 | Luke 23 | Hayden Walker

No doubt this story is familiar to you. You know the characters and the sequence of events. You remember Pilate and the chief priests and even Simon of Cyrene. However, when you remember the thief on the cross, you may recall the second man who received the promise of Paradise. However, it is the comment of the first thief that captivates me. From his own cross, the man yelled at Jesus, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39).

It is obvious that the thief equated relief from suffering and judgment with salvation. He did not see that Jesus was bringing salvation through His suffering. The man requested that Jesus save Himself and others. If Christ had chosen to save Himself, He certainly could have.

However, He could not save us apart from the cross. Because sin caused the great rupture between God and man, judgment had to be exacted upon someone. Someone had to suffer. Only Christ, fully God and fully man, was capable to pay the debt which humanity owed to God. It is through His suffering, not removal from the suffering, that He truly fulfilled the thief's plea for salvation.

As you contemplate the cross of Christ today, be encouraged in your own struggles. The famous British Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "He bears a cross, not that you may escape it, but that you may endure it." Jesus may not remove you from your anguish, but His faithfulness to remain on the cross for your salvation is a sure and steady reminder that He cares for you and is with you in the midst of your suffering. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Thursday, April 13 | Luke 24:1-12 | Hayden Walker

During seminary, I took part in a cross-cultural ministry experience in London. One morning, my team served in a homeless shelter. Those gathered at the shelter listened to a sermon before breakfast was served. While the preacher was sharing the gospel, a man exclaimed, "He was raised from the dead?!" He was shocked to hear this news.

Because the Easter story is so familiar to many of us, we do not often have this type of reaction upon hearing the resurrection account once again. However, I think that man's stunned response was closer to what the women and apostles must have felt that early Sunday morning. Though Jesus had prophesied about His resurrection, His followers had a hard time believing it actually happened. In fact, it seemed an "idle tale" to the apostles!

Peter went to the tomb to see for himself what had happened. After taking it all in, he "went home marveling" (Luke 24:12). Like Peter, when we grasp this truth of Christ's resurrection for ourselves, we will marvel because the reality of the resurrection changes everything. Death has truly been defeated. Christ's empty tomb gives us assurance that one day our graves will be empty as well; at His second



Luke

coming, we too will be resurrected! This is marvelous news worth celebrating: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

Friday, April 14 | Luke 24:13-53 | Hayden Walker

What is the most compelling book you've ever read? The most gripping movie you've ever seen? Can you imagine cutting those stories short, ending a couple of chapters early, or pausing the film with twenty minutes left? While we would be hesitant to do this with our stories, we often cut Scripture short. We would be remiss if we ignored this valuable passage today. We would be cutting the story short, and missing the real hope that we have for our own future.

This passage continues beyond the resurrection account; it is the longest and most detailed of the post-resurrection description of Jesus. This look at the resurrected Christ is the best glimpse we have of the glorified body. We read that Jesus walked with old friends and remembered and recounted Scripture to them. He was able to vanish and appear at will, He had flesh and bones, and He even ate fish!

His glorified body is quite real, and it was with this body that Jesus ascended into heaven. It is with this glorified body that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. It is with this body that He will come again. It is with similar glorified bodies that those who are in Christ will be raised. Our hope for this life and the life to come hinges completely upon the resurrection!

Saturday, April 15-Sunday, April 16 | Luke 22-24

Reread Luke 22-24 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.