



# *LENTEN DEVOTIONAL*

BY PASTOR CHAD FRANSEN



A JOURNEY  
TOWARD THE CROSS



# *DEAR READER,*

As we begin this season of Lent, we are invited on a journey toward the cross. The Gospel of Mark shows this progression as Jesus continues to point to this path for Himself, while others tend to have different plans. Mark compiled stories that show the teachings and miracles of Jesus and asks us to see the reactions of the people He encountered.

This daily devotional digs a little deeper into the stories of chapter 9 and beyond as we study this account on the life and teachings of Jesus. Take a moment each day to reflect on the Scripture of the day and write any thoughts down that come to your mind. Then go back after Easter and see what stands out to you.

On Sundays, you will have the opportunity to hear the sermon and dig deeper into the story of the week. It is our hope that this devotional fills the other days of the week with more content so that we can truly reflect on the mission of Jesus, so that we might celebrate His resurrection in a more powerful way than ever before. It truly is the best news!

Sincerely,

Pastor Chad



# MARCH 5<sup>TH</sup> - ASH WEDNESDAY

*As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed*  
*-Mark 9:2*

Chapter 9 is exactly in the middle of Mark's gospel. The story that we read in the first verses of this chapter is placed here as a transition. From this chapter on, Jesus is focused on His journey to the cross. One day, Peter, James and John were invited by Jesus to climb a mountain. So they set out on this trek. As they got to the top, the disciples were treated with an extraordinary experience. They saw three powerful images about the glory of the Son of God. They saw Jesus transform. The glory of the Lord radiated out of Him and His clothes. Then, Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah. They experienced a conversation between them and only they knew what was said. Before Moses and Elijah left, they heard the voice of God saying something that was similar to what He said at the baptism of Jesus. "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to Him."

As they descended the mountain, Jesus tells them that this is their little secret until after the resurrection.

Just like His disciples, Jesus wants to invite you to understand His glory. It's a journey where you get to see the full eternal character of God's plan for you and the whole world. Mark 9 follows Jesus from the mountain top and shows the path that He chose to the cross.

Think back to the start of your journey when you first saw the truth about the glory of God. What was it that made you first believe?

# MARCH 6<sup>TH</sup>

*The father instantly cried out, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!” -Mark 9:24*

The faith of this father is teetering between doubt and confidence. He has experienced great pain because of the impact of an evil spirit that possessed his child. Jesus demonstrated that He is more powerful than any evil spirit and cast out the demon right in front of the crowd. When the child took the hand of Jesus, he was restored.

I believe that the unbelief of the father vanished. As he hugged his son and he heard words come from his child’s mouth, he certainly was filled with relief, love, and joy.

Is there a time in your life when you were teetering in your faith and then Jesus convinced you? Take a moment to write that down.



# MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup>

*“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead.” -Mark 9:31*

The crucifixion of Jesus was not an accident. It was not a battle where the world figured out a way to finally kill this rabbi and therefore stifle the revolution. When we see Jesus teach His disciples in advance, we then see that His journey into Jerusalem was a long path of surrender. This is not the path that we naturally would take as humans. We outsmart, we fight, we destroy to win.

Jesus is inviting you into the Kingdom of God where His values and His path lead to life that is both abundant and everlasting. This involves learning a new way to think and a brand new perspective that is oftentimes the opposite of what the world teaches.

Make a list of five ways that you are different because you have entered the journey of faith with Jesus Christ.



# MARCH 8<sup>TH</sup>

*...anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me. -Mark 9:36*

There is nothing demanding about what Jesus offers us. He merely offers us the opportunity to join Him on His path to eternity with His loving Father. Many times, we humans get this wrong. We make rules and groups that go against the very teachings of Jesus. We make fences instead of opening up our houses.

I want you to listen carefully to the voice of Jesus who continues to offer you His friendship. When you join Him, He meets you with the heart of a servant. It is tempting to, then, use Him to get your own selfish desires. This destroys the reality of who God is. As a result, Jesus' invitation only works when you follow Him with a heart that is like His; that of a servant.

What situations get in the way of you having the heart of a servant?



# *SUNDAY, MARCH 9<sup>TH</sup>*

While Lent is a season of reflection and preparation, Sundays remain a celebration of the Resurrection. Traditionally, Sundays are not counted in the forty days of Lent because each Sunday is a "mini-Easter" celebrating Jesus' victory over sin and death. As such, these days serve as a weekly reminder of Christ's resurrection and our redemption, a time when our fasting is relaxed, and our spirits are lifted in worship.

During these Sundays, we encourage you to embrace joy and gratitude. Let each Sunday be a time to reflect on God's grace and the renewal that comes from Christ. Use this day to gather strength and perspective for the week ahead, and to deepen your understanding of God's steadfast love and mercy.

As you attend worship today, allow the hymns, prayers, and sermons to resonate deeply, reinforcing your journey through Lent. May these Sundays refresh and prepare your heart for the celebration of Easter.





# MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup>

*Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife?"*

*-Mark 10:2*

As Jesus was making His way to the cross, crowds gathered around Him to hear Him teach. This upset the Pharisees, who were the leaders of the church. As a result, they would often try to trap Jesus with His own words. This time, they brought up divorce. The response of Jesus is surprising. He refers to Moses (who He recently spent time with) and uses His authority to get back to what the Bible says in Genesis 2. More importantly, Jesus calls out the Pharisees by exposing the "hard hearts" of those who go against God's laws. Jesus shares an even higher standard of marriage when He is alone with His disciples.

Too many times we approach the Way of Jesus with hard hearts, not wanting to submit to His authority. But when we truly submit to His authority, we are invited into deeper relationships full of love, joy and peace.

Take a moment and put your hand out to God. Is it open and ready to receive? Or is it a fist that is stubborn and closed? Pray that God will open your heart and your hands to submit to His authority. Listen for His quiet voice to tell you how much He loves you and wants to bless you.



# MARCH 11<sup>TH</sup>

*Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them. -Mark 10:16*

This is the third time we find Jesus interacting with children in the last two chapters we have read in Mark. Jesus heals a child, calls us to be like children, and blesses them with a lesson for everyone else to have faith like a child. In these references, we see more of the compassion of Jesus. More than that, Jesus demonstrates the response that He desires from us. The children believe, run to Him, and get healed.

As you grow in your faith and maturity, where have you lost the innocence and purity of your original encounter with God? Are you able to return to that space while you continue to develop your relationship with Jesus?

Take a moment to write down the differences between how children experience faith and how an adult does. Where do you see yourself?



# MARCH 12<sup>TH</sup>

*Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. -Mark 10:21-22*

There are so many elements to this story. This man approaches Jesus. He has lived a very obedient life. He even seeks Jesus to ask Him the secret to finding eternal life. Yet, Jesus calls the man to a greater calling. I have heard many sermons about how the man wouldn’t give up his possessions because he was rich. However, the Bible doesn’t say what happens to him, only that he was sad.

Sacrifice comes at a cost. It is not easy to give up what you have to bless others. Jesus continues to teach that the Kingdom of Heaven is upside down from what we know to be true in this world.

Take a moment to ask Jesus what it takes to follow Him. What are you holding onto so much that you wouldn’t be able to let go? Put that in your fist, and slowly open up your hand and let God have it.



## MARCH 13<sup>TH</sup>

*The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God." -Mark 10:26-27*

This verse follows the teaching of Jesus where He says that rich people are as likely to get to heaven as a camel is likely to get through the eye of a needle. There are many sermons that have been shared about this story that say that it is either just an overstatement, or that the eye of a needle is actually a big passageway. This is amusing. Why? Because right after Jesus says this, He clearly says that everything is possible with God. That explains the camel situation directly. It means that Jesus was constantly working with people like the rich young ruler who was really asking the question: "What can I do with my power and my resources to get into Heaven?" Jesus continues to explain the path that He is taking into Jerusalem where the religious leaders are going to betray, torture and squirm their way out of killing Jesus because they feel threatened.

Following Jesus means you are willing to truly learn what sacrifice looks like. This journey into eternal life means that you understand the love of Jesus through His sacrifice...for us.

Write down some words that describe your response to this passage. Do you find yourself sad? Or are you willing to follow Jesus as He leads us into suffering? Remember that the reward is worth it.

# MARCH 14<sup>TH</sup>

*They will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again.” -Mark 10:34*

With the loving words of God still echoing in the ears of Jesus, we see Jesus fully understand the path that He is taking to the cross. He is constantly teaching His disciples that the crucifixion is not an accident or a defeat, but is, instead, a victory. Jesus is on the path where He is willing to sacrifice His life for us. The disciples continue to not understand what He is saying. I don't blame them. Jesus is getting more and more people to follow Him. And when you are in the inner circle, that means that you are getting more and more powerful as well. How quickly we can stop listening to Jesus. We too easily get caught up in the momentum of this world and the benefits that we get from fame and influence.

We have the benefit of knowing how the story ends, but we still miss the point. We forget that truly being an apprentice of Jesus, means that you are willing to be a servant. You are willing to sacrifice. You desire to love like Jesus sacrificially loved us.

What would you be willing to sacrifice for God? What would you NOT be willing to sacrifice? Take some time to pray for an open heart.



# MARCH 15<sup>TH</sup>

*“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked.*

*-Mark 10:51*

When a blind beggar approaches Jesus, the man is greeted with an interesting question. Jesus asks him what he wants. Shouldn't Jesus know? Shouldn't He just get to the point? No. Jesus speaks to the man's soul.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Stop and read that again. What if Jesus asked you this question? What would you say? If you were blind, the answer might be easier.

Picture Jesus approaching you. Imagine Him looking into your eyes. His attention is on your life. He is present. He stops and calls you by your name. He asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Write down what your heart is longing for. Pray this to Jesus. Check back in a few weeks to see if He answered your prayer.



# *SUNDAY, MARCH 16<sup>TH</sup>*

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## MARCH 17<sup>TH</sup>

*“Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, ‘What are you doing?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it soon.’” -Mark 11:2-3*

Two things happen when Jesus approaches Jerusalem. Both are predicted in Zechariah 9:9, where we read- that a king will come riding on a donkey. This is the dual message that Jesus presents. A King who will threaten the authorities and religious leaders, and a humble servant who comes in peace.

This is the balance between power and humility. We too quickly assume that humility means no power and that power means only self-interest. God sent His son Jesus to show us that the all-powerful creator of the universe can approach us with kindness and humility.

Do you ever find yourself doubting God’s power? Is it because you think that He is too humble or too much of a pushover? God works very hard to show us that His plan was prepared and lived out to show love and power at the same time.

How do you view God in regards to power and humility? Write down five words that describe your view of God.





# MARCH 18<sup>TH</sup>

*Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, "Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David! Praise God in highest heaven!" -Mark 11:9-10*

Jesus willingly rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey knowing full well that this places a target right on His life. Why does He do it? Obedience. Jesus understood His purpose and He understood God's timing.

When we look back at history and we think of heroes, we tend to forget that they did not know the outcome of their actions. There is always an opportunity to fail. For some that means poverty, for others, death.

Courage means that you look at the possibility of failure and you head into danger because you know your purpose and you risk everything with confidence. Jesus knew His purpose and timing as He was delivered into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. It was dangerous. It was deadly.

When you know the voice of God, you begin to understand the purpose and timing that God has for your life so that you know that when you face danger and risk, you can go with confidence. There is no better place to be than where God asks you to go.



# MARCH 19<sup>TH</sup>

*So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple.*

*-Mark 11:11*

As Jesus rides into town on the back of a donkey, He investigates the temple and then returns to Bethany. The next day Jesus returns to the Temple and knocks over the tables of those selling animals for sacrifice. Notice that there is another story placed in the middle of this story. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus curses a fig tree because He was hungry. When Jesus and His disciples returned, they noticed that this same fig tree was dead and uprooted.

This is no coincidence.

The plan from the beginning of the construction of the Temple was to have the life from the intimacy with God flow out of the Temple and trickle out into the world. Yet, Jesus finds the Temple not living up to its purpose. Instead, people used the Temple to make money. Similarly, the fig tree did not have fruit for Jesus to eat.

Jesus was making a point. He was teaching His disciples that true fellowship with God means that you respond by producing fruit. If not, what is the point?

When you look into your heart, are you so connected to God that you can see spiritual fruit flowing from your faith?

Take a moment to remember a time when you saw the impact that God had in your life to produce fruit. Write that down here.

# MARCH 20<sup>TH</sup>

*I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. -Mark 11:23*

There is a true story of a man who would walk on a tightrope over Niagara Falls. People would gather to watch. At some point, he invited people to ride on his back while he crossed the chasm. It's one thing to believe that he can do it, it is a completely different level of trust to actually travel with him.

Do you have that kind of faith in Jesus? Most people tend to go to church and think about the sermon and how the disciples in the Bible and the pastor at church lived out their faith. But how willing are you to truly get involved and test the claims of Jesus Christ? Jesus tells us that we can do amazing things when we don't have doubts in our hearts. But can we truly trust in God in a way that is risky and makes us feel vulnerable?

Take a moment to listen to the small, still voice of God. Is He calling you to something?



# MARCH 21<sup>ST</sup>

*But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too. -Mark 11:25*

Jesus teaches His disciples an important lesson about prayer. In order to have your prayers answered, you first need to forgive.

Being bitter is not good for us. It is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Instead, we need to first forgive others and this will help us to not hold a grudge. Then we see the important impact that forgiveness has in our lives. We experience freedom. And we experience forgiveness from God for ourselves.

Open your heart up to God. Where are you holding a grudge? Ask God to help you forgive the person you need to forgive, and then ask God to forgive you. True freedom begins here.



# MARCH 22<sup>ND</sup>

*Again they entered Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking through the Temple area, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders came up to him. They demanded, “By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?” -Mark 11:27-28*

au·thor·i·ty /əˈTHôrədē/

1. noun: the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.

The religious leaders had the responsibility to enforce obedience. So when Jesus would teach about the law and claimed to have an opinion that was different from those of the religious leaders, they felt threatened.

When Jesus turned over the tables in the Temple, those same people plotted to kill Him. Jesus continued to speak with authority because HE HAD AUTHORITY. People were constantly amazed that Jesus spoke with such authority.

Why is this important? Because the old system wasn't working. Jesus just cursed a fig tree and then turned over tables because the Temple was not doing what God intended. And the religious leaders were in charge of the Temple. Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the Temple to reclaim the authority that He had over the Temple.

He continues to show that our bodies are the new meaning of the Temple. Jesus was focused on us. He wants to have authority over our lives. And yet we find ourselves stubborn... threatened...rebellious...

The religious leaders were so threatened that they wanted to kill Jesus...

# *SUNDAY, MARCH 23<sup>RD</sup>*

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# MARCH 24<sup>TH</sup>

*The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus because they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away. -Mark 12:12*

Jesus avoided a trap by answering the religious leaders with a question that they couldn't safely answer. So Jesus keeps the pressure on. With the crowds and the religious leaders around, He tells a parable of a vineyard. The owner leases out his land and then sends workers to collect his share. But they beat the messengers and send them back to the owner with nothing. Then the owner sends his dearly loved son (notice the wording like we saw at both the baptism of Jesus and on the mountain with Moses and Elijah). They kill the son to try to claim the estate.

The religious leaders were enjoying this parable until they realized it was about them. Did they get the message? Yes. Did they change? No. They respond by plotting, once again, to kill Jesus.

When we are stubborn and think we know more than God, our hearts tend to get more and more stubborn. You are invited into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But it involves surrender and humility and a heart that is willing to be molded into one that is loving and obedient, and full of trust.

Where is your heart? When you think of Jesus telling you a story, how do you respond?



# MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup>

*Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, “Why are you trying to trap me? Show me a Roman coin, and I’ll tell you.”*

*-Mark 12:15b*

There is an old saying that going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car. Jesus points out that even though these religious leaders know the Scriptures and hold titles as religious leaders, their hearts don’t reflect what they outwardly portray.

Jesus is on a path that leads to the heart of the Temple in Jerusalem, where humans have taken over and have claimed their territory so that they can have power over people. The Temple is the place where Jesus was the most at home. He should have experienced the outpouring of love because of the prayers that have come from this house of God. And yet, Jesus was disappointed at what He found.

When we look into our own hearts, we must strive to be as honest as we can be so that God can grow us more and more like Him. Truly changed hearts overflow with love, faith and obedience.





# MARCH 26<sup>TH</sup>

*So he is the God of the living, not the dead. You have made a serious error.” -Mark 12:27*

There are three ways to think about life and death. You can focus on death and be afraid and try to find the “fountain of youth.” You can also live life like there is no death and that means that you live like you are invincible. The third option is that you live with the reality of death combined with a sense of the resurrection.

Jesus points out to the Sadducees, that the writings of the Old Testament clearly state that God has been the God of life since the very beginning. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has been on a journey toward His death on the cross. And yet, this awareness of the resurrection points to His Father’s power to resurrect.

This is the way that we need to live. We need to always be aware of our mortality and, yet, hold on tightly to the life we are given through our belief in our Savior who rescues us from death.



# MARCH 27<sup>TH</sup>

*Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this:  
'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only LORD.  
-Mark 12:29*

Jesus continues to teach in the Temple and He is confronted with the question, "what is the most important commandment?" Jesus sums it up well. He starts by saying the Shema. This phrase emphasized the importance of God being the only God. People at that time were living in a world filled with many gods and cultures worshipping whatever they wanted. Even though Jesus was fully human, he had to clearly communicate His unity with God.

Jesus, then, continues to say that the most important commandments are to love God and to love others. Not only does Jesus quote the Old Testament, but He simplifies it so much that the people listening completely agreed.

When we believe in the one true God, He asks us to love Him. And how do we best demonstrate our love for Him? By loving others. The message of Jesus is simple. When we understand the deep love that God has for us, we respond by loving others.



# MARCH 28<sup>TH</sup>

*Since David himself called the Messiah ‘my Lord,’ how can the Messiah be his son?” The large crowd listened to him with great delight. -Mark 12:37*

Jesus makes a bold claim about the Messiah that would have been mind-blowing to the crowds. Jesus quotes the words of David by saying that David was calling out to his Messiah.

Everyone knew that the Messiah would be coming through the line of David, and yet David still knew about the need for his Messiah. This combined the longing of the rescuer with the tradition of legacy that were both so important to the Jewish people.

This made the reality of the coming of the Messiah more and more possible, which meant that the anger and distrust of the Romans might possibly be soon over. This delighted the crowds. They heard what they wanted to hear. Yet, they didn’t know the plan of Jesus.

Too many times, we hear what we want to hear. Then we take this information and run with it, whether it is true or not. Just like the people in Jesus’ time, we need to fully understand God’s plan for our lives. It might involve some pain and suffering in order to get to where we need to go.

Spend a moment opening up your heart to the full plan of God. Write down any fears that you might have.



# MARCH 29<sup>TH</sup>

*Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.” -Mark 12:43-44*

We usually hear this passage in a sermon about money and how we should give more to the church. But when you look at it in context, you see that this is more about sacrifice and faith. Deep down in our hearts we see the need to take care of ourselves. We need to make sure that we have air, food and water. We also know that we need to be smart to make sure that this supply is guaranteed for us.

Jesus promises us that these are all taken care of through Him. He is the breath of life. He is the bread of life. He is the living water. And yet, we fight within us to take care of ourselves.

This widow knew the promises of God to be true. She didn't need to depend on herself.

When you look into your heart, what do you hold onto a little too tightly? What are some ways that you could let go and trust in God's plan for your life, and truly be willing to sacrifice?



# *SUNDAY, MARCH 30<sup>TH</sup>*

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# MARCH 31<sup>ST</sup>

*Jesus replied, “Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!” -Mark 13:2*

Jesus was speaking about the destruction of the Temple that actually did happen in 70 AD. Here is what we know about this from the Jewish general Josephus, who in order to save himself, turned himself into an historian. The Jewish people started to revolt against the Roman occupation in 64 AD. The Romans then responded by setting up a siege around the city. Josephus was able to get into the meetings with the Romans who were demanding that they attack. But the Roman general, Titus, responded by saying that the Jewish people were fighting against themselves. If the Romans attacked, this would unify the Jews, and they would, therefore, be more difficult to defeat.

This turned out to be the perfect strategy. With the Jewish people suffering from desperation and hunger, the Romans faced little resistance after the siege and they entered into the Temple and burned it down.

Jesus knew the importance of unity. The disciples knew the importance of unity. If we want to survive, we must focus on what brings us together. This is why what Jesus did for us on the cross is so important. We are united in Christ.



# APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup>

*“When these things begin to happen, watch out! You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. -Mark 13:9*

Again, Jesus predicts the future. In the book of Acts, we see this unfold as Stephen, the martyr is placed before the council. He doesn't worry about what to say. The Bible states that Stephen started sharing the entire story of God's plan from the beginning and while he was doing it, he began to glow.

In the face of fear, we usually have two options. Fight or flight. Jesus is offering a third option that my ethics professor, Glen Stassen, calls Jesus' transforming initiative. There is always a way to point to Jesus and overcome the situation.

When you encounter a difficult situation, Jesus challenges us to trust in the Holy Spirit to give us the words to speak, and to face the situation knowing that God is not only with us, but gives us this opportunity to tell people about our loving God who sent His Son Jesus to rescue us.



## APRIL 2<sup>ND</sup>

*And everyone will hate you because you are my followers.  
But the one who endures to the end will be saved.  
-Mark 13:13*

I don't love this passage. I am a people pleaser. I really like to have people like me. And yet, when we take our relationship with Jesus seriously, He warns us that we will not always be liked. People may even hate us.

Ouch.

As we grow spiritually, our faith develops in a way that shows the importance of prioritizing our relationship with God in a way that is more intense than all of our other relationships. It doesn't mean that we still don't love others, as we were taught by Jesus to love God and love others. Instead, we learn that we must prioritize our relationships so that it is ONLY GOD whom we are trying to please.

When we fall into the trap of pleasing others, we lose our identity and we quickly lose our way. When we truly try to please God, we learn more about what God created us to do, and we understand a deeper sense of who we are.

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Do what He says. This is the path to life.





## APRIL 3<sup>RD</sup>

*“Then if anyone tells you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There he is,’ don’t believe it. -Mark 13:21*

Jesus described the fall of Jerusalem earlier in the 13th Chapter of Mark. . History tells us that the siege that the Romans built around the city created such infighting that the Jewish people were left to eat each other.

When people get desperate, they do strange things. They act in ways that are not good for others and not good for themselves. When we feel desperate, we are much more likely to fall for people who tell us what we want to hear.

On this journey to the cross, the gospel writer, Mark, continues to show that Jesus was on a mission to carry out the plan of God to suffer and die for us as a Passover lamb so that we may be purified because of the blood of Jesus. This is the truth. No other story compares. No other story fulfills the prophecies. Nothing has impacted history as much as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ..

When we get away from this truth, we get desperate. We believe the lies. We are led away from God.

Take a moment to truly ask God to show you His path for your life. Pray for the truth. It will set you free.



## APRIL 4<sup>TH</sup>

*Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory. -Mark 13:26*

Jesus just rode on a donkey into the place where His life and teachings will get Him killed. He knew that He was submitting to the will of the people, including the religious leaders. However, He did it humbly and obediently.

Then, as He was teaching in Jerusalem, He described a different way that He would return – with power and glory. We see this same image in the book of the Revelation in the nineteenth chapter. The rider will come on a white horse with the armies of Heaven following behind Him.

We always have to remember the power of God, while we remember the humility of God. Too many times, we find ourselves incorrectly judging the power of God based upon His kindness. If someone is kind, we think, then they are not powerful.

When I was in college, I lived next door to a lineman for the football team. He was enormous. I immediately befriended him because I was small. I imagined that no one would fight me because he was my friend. He shared with me later that if I caused a fight, he would not back me up.

Power and humility exist independently from each other. God is both powerful and humble. Jesus shows His power by submitting to God's Will through being humbled on the cross. This ultimate price was what was needed to conquer death.

Do you think of God as more humble or more powerful? How do they coexist?

# APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>

*I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!*

*-Mark 13:37*

Jesus tells several parables about being ready for the return of the Messiah. While His return won't be announced, you should be able to see the signs.

We need to be ready.

When someone prepares a dinner feast at their house, they make the necessary preparations so that they are ready for their guests. They clean, make food, and prepare the location for where the people will gather. It would be foolish to not be ready.

Similarly, we have to make plans for the second coming of the Messiah. We have faith, we look for the signs, and then we respond with true devotion. This is the way that Jesus wants us to live. The alternative is to live foolishly with no evidence that God is in our lives. If we live this way, we will miss the party.

Take a few moments to write down some ways that you can prepare for the Messiah so that you don't miss His return.



# *SUNDAY, APRIL 6<sup>TH</sup>*

While Lent is a season of reflection and preparation, Sundays remain a celebration of the Resurrection. Traditionally, Sundays are not counted in the forty days of Lent because each Sunday is a "mini-Easter" celebrating Jesus' victory over sin and death. As such, these days serve as a weekly reminder of Christ's resurrection and our redemption, a time when our fasting is relaxed, and our spirits are lifted in worship.

During these Sundays, we encourage you to embrace joy and gratitude. Let each Sunday be a time to reflect on God's grace and the renewal that comes from Christ. Use this day to gather strength and perspective for the week ahead, and to deepen your understanding of God's steadfast love and mercy.

As you attend worship today, allow the hymns, prayers, and sermons to resonate deeply, reinforcing your journey through Lent. May these Sundays refresh and prepare your heart for the celebration of Easter.



## APRIL 7<sup>TH</sup>

*It was now two days before the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and the teachers of religious law were still looking for an opportunity to capture Jesus secretly and kill him. "But not during the Passover celebration," they agreed, "or the people may riot."*  
-Mark 14:1-2

Every year since the Exodus, Jewish people would travel to Jerusalem for a weeklong festival filled with feasts and rituals that were mandatory. Jesus travelled into Jerusalem for these festivals, and we find Him teaching and creating a buzz about His authority. The religious leaders continued to be offended and threatened. They reacted by plotting a way to kill Jesus. The only problem that they had was that He was getting too popular. They wanted to keep the people in their control while getting rid of Jesus. The Passover would not be a good time to do this, they thought.

Early on in the public ministry of Jesus, which was about three years, He does not promote himself to be the Messiah. He only demonstrates His power to heal and care for those crying out for help. During this last trip into Jerusalem, this is no longer the case. Jesus increases His boldness and confronts those in leadership and they respond with plans to kill Him. He knew this was dangerous.

What do you do when you are faced with fear? Do you head into danger, or do you run? Jesus calls us to obey. Are you willing?



# APRIL 8<sup>TH</sup>

*While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head. -Mark 14:3*

The word Christ means anointed one. In the Old Testament, there are significant events that involve oil. Jacob anoints the rock that he sleeps on with oil after his dream about heaven (Genesis 28) and God commands the Israelites to anoint the tabernacle and the priests with oil to make them Holy (Exodus 40). Each time we see these references to anointing with oil, we get a sense of the coming Christ that will fulfill the prophecy from the beginning of time.

Then we see this woman approach Jesus with an expensive jar of perfume. Without regard for what people might think, she pours the liquid over the head of Jesus. What an incredible act of worship. She truly understood the importance of this man who people called the Messiah.

Some responded with disdain and scolded her. But Jesus explained that she anointed him for burial and that her act would be remembered forever.

Picture yourself in this story. How would you have responded?



# APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup>

*Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the leading priests to arrange to betray Jesus to them.*

*-Mark 14:10*

We give Judas a bad name. Probably because he deserves it. But when we look at his life, maybe he isn't that different from us. I believe Judas was excited about Jesus. I believe Judas understood the power and plan of Jesus. I even think that Judas saw all of the potential of Jesus.

Unfortunately, he forgot to know Jesus. Judas was so caught up in the revolution to get rid of the Romans from occupying their nation, that he wasn't listening to the teachings of Jesus. And while betraying Jesus was essential in fulfilling the prophecy, I also think that it is an important lesson for us as we are tempted to go on ahead without Jesus.

Judas was bribed with money. He gave into temptation and helped the religious leaders deceive Jesus. His actions didn't have any effect on what was going to happen to Jesus. His actions showed his heart.

Many times we leave the presence of God and seek after our own will. We think we know better. We live according to our own plans.

How do we avoid this? We stop. We take a deep breath. We ask God to show us His Will. And then we do it. Don't miss out on knowing Jesus. He wants to be in your life.



## APRIL 10<sup>TH</sup>

*So the two disciples went into the city and found everything just as Jesus had said, and they prepared the Passover meal there. -Mark 14:16*

The Passover meal is an annual tradition commanded by God in the book of Exodus. Participants in the Passover meal go through the entire story of when God freed His people from slavery in Egypt by sending the 10 plagues. The tenth plague was when God killed the firstborn sons of any household that didn't have the blood of a lamb on their door frame. If the spirit saw the blood on the door, it passed over the house and the son was spared.

Jesus grew up having this meal. It was a long feast where they would eat the entire lamb and drink four cups of wine that would signify four different stages of the meal. When we understand this tradition, it brings to life the words that Jesus teaches regarding communion. The bread Jesus breaks is part of the ceremony. It is broken and placed in white linens and then hidden for the children to find. When it is returned, they enjoy dessert. The cup is the third cup which Jesus refers to as the cup of salvation. Symbolically, Jesus says to drink this cup is to have your sins forgiven. The bread and the wine are the body and blood of Christ. Every time they have that meal, they should remember Jesus.

This meal takes on an even greater significance after Jesus is crucified. He fulfills God's plan from the beginning, and willingly sacrifices His life as a ransom for many. I love to picture the next year after the resurrection of Jesus when the disciples gathered to have the Passover meal. Peter was likely the leader and they likely recounted all of the symbolism and the teachings of Jesus and how it coincided perfectly with the Passover meal.



**APRIL 11<sup>TH</sup>**

*As they were at the table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you eating with me here will betray me."*

*-Mark 14:18*

Have you ever been accused of something that you did not do? I have. Not only does it feel terrible, but it makes me question if maybe I did do it.

Now think about a time when you did do something wrong and you realize that others are trying to find out who did it. My guilt makes it impossible for me to think clearly. My heart starts racing and I feel like there is a spotlight on me. I immediately plan a lie. That comes naturally. Wisdom has taught me that my lies don't work.

Jesus knows that Judas is going to betray Him and He sends him on his way. As Judas disappears into the night, he not only leaves Jesus that night, but he chooses to take control. This leads to his demise.

I am grateful that, because of the resurrection, we are able to approach God with our guilt and shame and confess our sins. Jesus paid the price for our sins and took on the punishment.



# APRIL 12<sup>TH</sup>

Preparing for Palm Sunday (remember back in Mark 11)

*“Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks, ‘What are you doing?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it soon.’” -Mark 11:2-3*

When you take a moment to reflect on what God does for us, it really is overwhelming. The Bible tells us that we are knitted in our mother’s womb and God sculpts who we are. Then He crafts our lives with family and events. Nothing is an accident.

When God’s people were in slavery, God set them free. When Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den, God saved his life. In the middle of the storm, Jesus is in control. The disciples are being led into a dangerous place at a dangerous time and God continues to provide anything that they need.

God is at work. Whether it is preparing a donkey for his triumphant entry (Palm Sunday) or a place for Jesus to hold the Passover meal, God provides.

Trust Him. Praise Him. Follow Him. He is with you.



# *PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13<sup>TH</sup>*

While Lent is a season of reflection and preparation, Sundays remain a celebration of the Resurrection. Traditionally, Sundays are not counted in the forty days of Lent because each Sunday is a "mini-Easter" celebrating Jesus' victory over sin and death. As such, these days serve as a weekly reminder of Christ's resurrection and our redemption, a time when our fasting is relaxed, and our spirits are lifted in worship.

During these Sundays, we encourage you to embrace joy and gratitude. Let each Sunday be a time to reflect on God's grace and the renewal that comes from Christ. Use this day to gather strength and perspective for the week ahead, and to deepen your understanding of God's steadfast love and mercy.

As you attend worship today, allow the hymns, prayers, and sermons to resonate deeply, reinforcing your journey through Lent. May these Sundays refresh and prepare your heart for the celebration of Easter.



# APRIL 14<sup>TH</sup>

*Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind:*

*"Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me." And he broke down and wept.*

*-Mark 14:72*

Peter was bold. He said that he would never deny Jesus.

Words are cheap.

Peter had every intention of staying by the side of Jesus. He wanted to continue as the greatest disciple. Having your leader beaten and sentenced to death has a way to make things very confusing.

Too many times, we think we know what we would do if something challenging was presented to us. In reality, we have no idea how we would respond until it actually happens. Heroes are a different breed. They are the ones who follow through when faced with death.

Take a moment to feel the emotions of Peter. Then remember that after the resurrection, Jesus fully restored Peter and made him the leader of the Church.



# APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup>

*They dressed him in a purple robe, and they wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head. -Mark 15:17*

Jesus didn't just endure the crucifixion. Before He was crucified, He was tortured with a lead-tipped whip until His back was torn apart. They slapped Him and spit on Him. They placed a throne of thorns on His head and replaced His clothes with a purple robe as they mockingly worshipped Him.

With blood pouring out of Him, Jesus was forced to carry His own cross to the place where He would be nailed on the cross. As they elevated Jesus, gravity pulled him down so that breathing became almost impossible. The gospel of Mark says that it took six hours of suffering before Jesus took His last breath.

Jesus paid the price for our sins. Torture. Ridicule. Death. Just for you. Just for me.



# APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup>

*Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. -Mark 15:37-38*

In the Old Testament, God instructs the Israelites to build a Tabernacle so that He could live among them. So they did. In the middle of the camp, there was the Holy of Holies. This was where the High Priest would go into the inner tent once a year and be in the presence of God.

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil was torn. This veil was the inner part of the Temple. This meant that no longer would we need a High Priest to come and represent us. Now we have the full access of God through Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate the resurrection, remember that the intimacy we share with God was made possible by the death of Jesus on the cross.



## *APRIL 17<sup>TH</sup>*

*When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!"*  
*-Mark 15:39*

This might be the main point of the Gospel of Mark. Mark begins with a claim that Jesus is the Messiah. But then it goes on to show how people respond to Jesus. Some people believe, some doubt, some accuse, some betray. But, then, we see the reaction of this Roman officer who truly understands that Jesus truly is the Son of God.

He gets it.

Why? This Roman officer knew that Jesus was innocent. He saw the ridicule and torment that Jesus endured. Then it became clear to him. He saw the holiness. He saw the strength of how Jesus submitted. He saw the truth.

When we open our eyes to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we begin to understand the deepest form of love. Jesus laid down His life for us.



## APRIL 18<sup>TH</sup>

*Pilate couldn't believe that Jesus was already dead, so he called for the Roman officer and asked if he had died yet. The officer confirmed that Jesus was dead, so Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. Joseph bought a long sheet of linen cloth. Then he took Jesus' body down from the cross, wrapped it in the cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone in front of the entrance. -Mark 15:44-46*

Romans were very good at killing people. They did it not only to punish, but also to send a message to anyone who was thinking about going against them. So when it came time to pronounce death, they didn't make mistakes.

The body of Jesus was wrapped in a linen cloth. Just like the bread at the Passover meal was wrapped in linen cloth. His body was placed in a tomb and a large stone was rolled in front of it.

Jesus died a brutal death and His tomb was guarded by Roman guards so that no one would steal His body and make a claim that He was still alive.

It is good for us to mourn the death of Jesus. It was the price that was necessary to pay for our sins. It is extra sad because Jesus was innocent.





# APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup>

*“Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. -Mark 16:6*

There is an interesting note in most of our Bibles about the way the Gospel of Mark ends. It ends in different ways. Even though many versions of the Bible include verses 9-19 in Mark 16, the most reliable early manuscripts end after verse eight.

Why would Mark have ended after verse eight? It is more like a cliffhanger that gives you a challenge. As we look over the entire story of the Gospel of Mark, we see that Mark doesn’t want to just tell you what to believe, he wants you to discover it for yourself. Ending on verse eight makes more sense because it ends with the invitation for you to go and discover it for yourself.

Just a note here. Some people think that the resurrection isn’t included in the short version of Mark 16. That is not true. Every ending in the Gospel of Mark has Jesus being gone from the tomb. Don’t let them fool you.

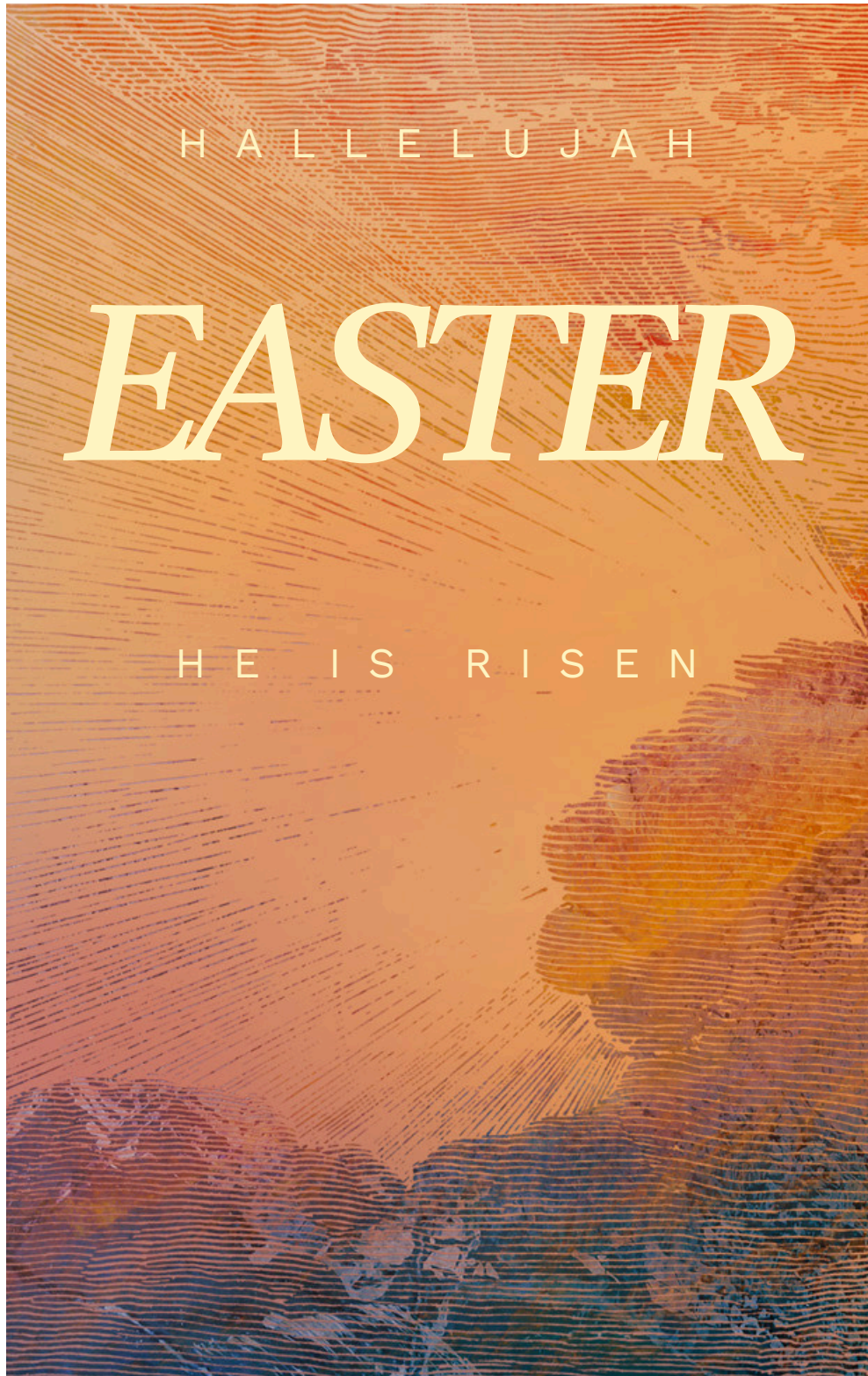
This amazing ending to this story is an open invitation for us to go and discover the invitation to a life of following God through Jesus, the Anointed One. If you see what Jesus did for you, you will respond like the Roman soldier who truly believed that Jesus is the Son of God.



H A L L E L U J A H

# *EASTER*

H E I S R I S E N







# EASTER

SUNDAY, APRIL 20TH

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6:30AM BALBOA PARK

9:00AM TRADITIONAL

10:15AM CONTEMPORARY

11:00AM TRADITIONAL



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Presbyterian Church

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