

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading
February 29 – March 6

Monday, February 29 – John 19: 38 - 20: 31

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were both men of standing in the Jewish community, but both were also disciples of Jesus (remember the story of Nicodemus in John 3). While all of Jesus' other disciples seemed to vanish in the wind these two men went and asked Pilate for permission to bury Jesus in a tomb that Joseph of Arimathea would furnish. As Mary Magdalene and some other women come to the tomb early in the morning they find the empty tomb, and the first conclusion that they arrive at is that someone has taken Jesus' body.

The other disciple that John refers to in 20: 3 and 4 is none other than John, the writer of this gospel. Notice the boldness of Peter to go ahead and go into the tomb to investigate what has happened, but it is John (verse 9) who is the first to believe that Jesus has indeed risen from the grave.

In verses 10 - 18 it is clear that Mary Magdalene has still not processed the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead. As she sees Jesus face to face she doesn't recognize him. How could this be? It might be because the light was still bad, or maybe Mary's eyes were blinded by tears, or maybe there was something different about the way Jesus looked, but as soon as Jesus said her name she recognized his voice immediately. Notice that Mary, a sinful, downtrodden woman, was the first person Jesus appeared to after his resurrection. Jesus' instruction to Mary to not hold onto him was his way of telling her that she could not cling to his physical body because he would soon be leaving this earth to ascend to heaven.

In verses 19 -31 Jesus appears to the other disciples. Notice in this passage that Jesus' resurrected body is like ours in some ways. The scars of the crucifixion still showed, and could be touched, but Jesus could also walk through locked doors. What is really important here is Thomas' confession in verse 28 after he touches Jesus' resurrected body, "My Lord and My God." This confession sums up the message of John's Gospel.

Tuesday, March 01 – John 21: 1 – 25

In this passage Jesus publicly reinstates Peter as a disciple and commissions Peter to do the work of caring for Christ's Church. Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves Jesus, because Peter denied Jesus three times the night Jesus was crucified. Very likely in verses 18 – 19, Jesus is telling Peter what is going to happen to Peter in the years ahead. Tradition (it is not in the Bible) has it that Peter was arrested and imprisoned in Rome. He was eventually crucified there, but at Peter's request he was crucified upside down because he was not worthy of dying the same death as Jesus died.

Wednesday, March 02 – Hebrews 1: 1 – 14

We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews. Some believe it was the apostle Paul and others believe it was Barnabas (one of Paul's co-workers). There is a sense in which the book of Hebrews ties in very nicely with the Gospel of John. Yesterday we read that John's Gospel ended with Jesus telling Peter he would be arrested and put to death in Rome. The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were facing persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire, and as a result of this persecution many of them were thinking of abandoning Christ and going back to Judaism.

John's Gospel emphasizes that while Jesus was fully human he was also God. The Book of Hebrews goes to great lengths to show these Jewish believers who, facing persecution, just how great Jesus is and how superior Jesus is to anything else they have or could have worshipped in the past.

The opening chapter of Hebrews starts to drive this point home. Jesus is greater than the prophets (verses 1 and 2) because he is God made flesh and the creator of the universe, who rules over all things (verse 3). Jesus is superior to angels (verses 4 – 14).

Thursday, March 03 – Hebrews 2: 1 – 18

In chapter 2 of Hebrews the writer warns his readers to pay careful attention to what they have heard so that they do not drift away and start to believe other things, or a watered down version of who Jesus is.

“How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” Verse 8 recognizes the reality of the world we live in. Everything is subject to the rule and authority of Jesus, but not everything is yet.

Verse 9 gives us a clear picture that Jesus, who is eternally God, was made a little lower than the angels (he became flesh), but now he is crowned with glory and honor as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Verse 10 teaches us that Jesus was perfected through suffering, in other words, Jesus’ obedience wasn’t an easy obedience—it was an obedience that was proven through suffering.

Verses 14 - 18 teach us that Jesus had to be like us in order to save us. Jesus could only be the perfect sacrifice for our sins by being just like us in everyway—but without sin. Because Jesus has suffered as we suffer and experienced life as we experience life, he is able to help us in the face of our temptations.

Friday, March 04 – Hebrews 3: 1 – 19

In chapter 3 the writer of Hebrews continues to make the case that Jesus is greater than anything or anyone else by comparing Jesus to Moses. Moses was viewed by the Jews as the greatest leader Israel ever had and as one who spoke for God. In these verses the writer of Hebrews makes the point that Jesus is greater than Moses, because while Moses was a faithful servant in God’s house, Jesus was the builder of the house (verses 3-6). Jesus is the one who is worthy of our thoughts being fixed on him because of his faithful obedience to the Father’s will.

When Moses led the Israelites out of slavery to Egypt there were many Israelites who rebelled and actually wanted to go back to Egypt when things got bad for them. Because of their rebellion the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, and many did not get to enter into the rest of the Promised Land. The writer of Hebrews is warning us not to be like the Israelites, who wanted to turn back, because of their unbelief.

Saturday, March 05 – Hebrews 4: 1 – 13

As you read this passage pay careful attention to verse 2. The message of the gospel has no value if we don’t combine it with faith. Faith looks

forward to what we do not yet have. In chapter 4, the writer makes the point that even though the Israelites who entered the Promised Land experienced rest, it was not the ultimate rest that the Gospel promises to us. Verse 11 reminds us that our lives must be about making sure that we do all that we need to do in order to be able to enter that rest. The only way we can enter that rest is through faith, but our faith is shown by our actions. Now, think how verse 12 ties into this idea. The word of God cuts into us because it convicts us of what we must do, and our faith is proven genuine if we are doers of the word.

Sunday, March 06 – Hebrews 4: 14 - 5: 10

Now the writer of Hebrews moves from comparing Jesus and Moses to comparing Jesus to the high priests of Israel. He refers to Jesus as the Great High Priest. As our Great High Priest, Jesus has been through everything that we have been through. He has been tempted as we have been tempted, but was without sin. Think about that for a moment. Jesus became like you, and Jesus has faced every temptation that you have faced but was without sin. He knows what we are going through and sympathizes with us.

This passage also introduces us to a priest named Melchizedek. Melchizedek was king/priest in Salem at the time Abraham first entered the Promised Land (Genesis 14: 18-20). Melchizedek's name means righteous king, and Salem would later become known as Jerusalem. We don't know much about him, but we do know that he was a great king/priest because in Genesis 14:19-20 Abraham offers to give him a tithe of the plunder he has taken in war. Psalm 110 is a prophetic Psalm about Jesus and in this Psalm Jesus is referred to as a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek.

Pay careful attention to verses 8 and 9 of chapter 5. In these verses the writer makes a point of telling us that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. This does not mean that Jesus was ever disobedient—it means that Jesus' obedience was made perfect through his suffering. Jesus' obedience was not an easy or cheap obedience. It was a costly obedience that suffering proved genuine.