

## *Day 1*

*April 2*



*Pray | Thank God for sending Jesus to be our Messiah.*

Jesus is the Messiah promised throughout the Old Testament; not the Messiah the Jews had come to expect, but the Messiah the world needed.

From the very beginning, God's plan to redeem the world included the promise of a Messiah, a King who would crush oppression and bring eternal freedom for all people. This Messiah was to come from the people of Israel. Over time a false view had developed that this Messiah would be a political or national savior for the Jews, and this was a powerful source of hope for them. In our passage for the week, we see Jesus, the promised Messiah, begin to reveal his true purpose, and a vision for what it will mean to follow the Messiah. This revelation will be the ultimate source of hope for the world, but very a difficult message for the Jews. Like the Jews, we also can have selfish expectations for Jesus, potentially causing us to miss our true purpose as a follower of the Messiah. Like Peter, we need divine revelation of these truths, made possible by regularly coming into the presence of God in prayer and reflection on his Word – the Bible.



*Read | Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Matthew 16:13-17*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

How would you answer Jesus if he asked you, “Who do you say that I am?” Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts on this. Consider using these words to give God glory as part of coming into his presence in prayer.

What selfish or “world inspired” expectations for Jesus do you have now, or have you had in the past? How did they impact your view of Jesus and how you lived your life? If you can't think of any, it may be because you have yet to recognize them as such. Go to God in prayer with an open mind and heart and ask God to reveal the truth to you.

God has a distinct purpose for you and your life that is in alignment with his mission as the Messiah of the world. Our duty as his followers is to watch and listen intentionally for God to reveal that purpose, and then to respond wholeheartedly. Spend a few minutes reflecting on how you are intentionally listening and watching for your call to duty.

*Day 2*  
*April 3*



*Pray | Praise God for his church and empowering it for his glory.*

The church of Jesus Christ is the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth, charged to bring increasing glory to the King until he returns.

Jesus reveals that one of his purposes as Messiah is to establish his church here on earth. This conversation with his disciples is one of the few times Jesus ever mentions the church. The church is a community of people *called out* to serve the Messiah – it is the earthly presence of the Kingdom of the Messiah. Jesus reveals two purposes of the church. First, the church will be built on a rock, and the powers of hell will not prevail against it. The church will resist the influences of Satan and sin on the world, and amazingly, success is assured! Second, the church will hold the keys to the Kingdom of the Messiah. The gospel, the plan God put in place to redeem the world, is the key to the Kingdom. The church must bring that message to the world. As members of this church, we bear great responsibility, but we draw on infinite resources and promises from a loving and faithful Messiah.



*Read | Matthew 16:17-20; Ephesians 2:19-20*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Ephesians 2:19-20 describes the church as God's holy people, a family, God's house – built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, and the foundation of the disciples and prophets. In what ways does the church today resemble those characteristics – in what ways does it not?

The church is called to resist the powers of hell. How do the powers of hell manifest themselves in your life and in the community and world in which you live? How are you and your church community resisting these powers?

Sharing the gospel message with those who have not heard it or have rejected it previously is the primary purpose of the church. Take a few minutes to talk through (or write down) how you will share the gospel message with someone who needs to hear it.

## Day 3

April 4



*Pray | Ask God to reveal the threat of sin and Satan in your life.*

Until the final return of Jesus Christ, when sin will be finally conquered, the Church will be under constant attack from the great deceiver Satan.

Because his time on earth was so pivotal in the larger plan to redeem earth from sin and the control of Satan, Jesus was under constant attack from Satan. In our passage today, Jesus recognized Satan working through Peter as Peter tried to convince Jesus that he really did not need to suffer and die. Satan is a master manipulator and deceiver. As with Peter, he can take seemingly good emotions and thoughts and use them to counter the purposes of the Messiah. In stating that a primary role of his church will be to resist the powers of hell, Jesus recognizes the reality of these powers. While he promises the church will prevail, he does not promise it will be easy. As we wait for the final return of the Messiah, we need to be on constant watch for influences of the devil, discerning Godly truth from worldly manipulation.



*Read | Matthew 16:18, 21-23; Matthew 4:1-11*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

The devil is a master of taking good gifts that we receive from God and turning them into idols (false gods) in our lives. What good gift(s) from God are you most tempted to replace God with? Ask God to show you how you can resist this temptation.

There are consequences to both excessively focusing on the reality of the devil and ignoring the reality of the devil. What are the consequences of each, and how do you find a good balance?

The recounting of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness makes it seem pretty easy to detect the devil at work. The reality is that recognizing temptation from the devil can be tricky. What lessons do you take away from how Jesus handled these temptations?

## Day 4

April 5



*Pray / For strength and wisdom to choose soul over body.*

Jesus' redefined vision of Messiah led him down a path of self-denial, suffering and death. The same is true for those who call him Lord.

Jesus continues the process of resetting expectations for the Messiah by revealing the path his life on earth must take. Despite clear indications from the Old Testament (Isaiah 53) that the Messiah would be despised, rejected, and a man of suffering, the Jews were expecting something different. They hoped to follow their Messiah to political victory and national freedom. Instead, Jesus is now asking them to follow him down a path of self-denial, suffering and possible death. Quite a change! How often are our expectations for our Lord the same as the Jews? We expect peaceful, comfortable lives, and when that is disrupted, we get anxious, frustrated and even angry with God. As a follower of this Messiah, your response must be different. Jesus is asking you to join him, to take up your cross and follow. In this you will distinguish yourself from the world, and bring glory to God.



*Read / Isaiah 53:1-5; Matthew 16:21-26; Philippians 3:7-11*



*Reflect / Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

In Matthew 16:25, Jesus tells the disciples, “whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it”. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, take a few minutes to reflect on how this reality played out in your life. This is the heart of your salvation story – be ready to tell that story all the time! If you are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, take a few minutes to reflect on why you have not given your life to the Messiah whose life, death and resurrection we celebrate at Easter. Consider giving your life, confident that you will find a new life with new and greater meaning and significance.

In Matthew 16:26, Jesus compares the value of your soul with the value of worldly treasures. What is your soul? Why is it so valuable?

In Philippians 3:8, Paul talks about the “*surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*”, and that he considers all the worldly things he has accumulated to be “*garbage*”. Take a few minutes to reflect on your life and your view on your worldly possessions – your house, your car, your investment account, your power, your social status – are you able to see them as garbage when compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ?

## Day 5

April 6



*Pray / Praise God for the real possibility of eternal life with him.*

Jesus' death and resurrection are the foundation for our faith in him. He promises this faith will ultimately be rewarded with eternal life with him.

Through his sinless life, his willing and loving sacrifice, and his mighty resurrection, Jesus proved himself to be the true Messiah. As a result, the separation from God that resulted from sin can now be overcome, and the perfect creation that God intended is again possible. As followers of Jesus, that is the primary desire of our hearts – to be restored to perfect communion with our Creator. That will happen when Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom here on earth. Until then we are called to take up our crosses and follow our Messiah and Lord. Praise God that we do not need to do this on our own. Our Messiah sent his Holy Spirit to live inside us, to strengthen and guide us on the journey. Through that communion with the Holy Spirit we get a taste of the perfect communion we will experience in heaven.



*Read / Isaiah 53:10-12; Matthew 16:27-28; Romans 10:9-13*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

How does the promised reward of eternal and perfect communion (relationship) with God inspire your thoughts and actions daily?

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul reminds us of the reality of the Holy Spirit, and that our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit. “*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*” How does the reality of the Holy Spirit inside you shape your daily thoughts and activities?

As Jesus describes his final return in Matthew 16:27, he promises that each person will be rewarded, “*according to what they have done.*” While the Bible clearly says that we cannot earn the gift of eternal life by our actions, Jesus is clearly stating that the nature of the eternal reward will be based on what we have done. Take a few minutes to reflect on how that reality influences and motivates you.

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