

Date: September 1, 2009

Reading: Matthew 1-4

In Revelation 12, the seven-headed dragon awaited the birth of the male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. He stood before the woman (probably not meant to represent Mary) who was about to give birth in order to devour her child just as soon as it was born. He was unsuccessful and her child was caught up to God and His throne (vs. 1-5).



When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he could have put Mary away, but he didn't -- because an angel of the Lord informed him that

Mary had not been immoral; she would give birth to the Savior of His people.

Herod instructed the wise men who sought the infant Jesus to return to him and inform him of the location of the child. Herod evidently wished to kill the child, but he was unable -- because the wise men were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod and so they went home by a different route.

Herod might have found the infant Jesus through other means, but he didn't -- because Joseph was warned in a dream to flee with his family to Egypt.

When Joseph brought his family back from Egypt, he took them to Galilee. He avoided Judea, ruled by Archelaus, the son of Herod, -- because God warned him in a dream. You just can't thwart God's plans!

In three and a half chapters, Matthew takes us from before the birth of Jesus to the beginning of His public ministry, a period of over thirty years. The evangelist also records the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptizer. John was sent to turn the people back to God, to prepare them for the ministry of Jesus (3:2-3).

Before Jesus' public ministry began, He was baptized by John and tempted by Satan. Early in His ministry, Jesus called four fishermen to follow Him, informing them that He had a greater work for them -- they would be "fishers of men."

Observe how many connections Matthew makes to Old Testament statements in his account. "All this was done that it might be fulfilled..."

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: January 1, 2010

Reading: Matthew 1-2

“While he thought about these things” – the thoughts which must have gone through Joseph’s mind (1:20)! His intended wife had been discovered to be pregnant. The natural and obvious conclusion was that she had been unfaithful to him (had Mary told him about her conversation with Gabriel?). He probably couldn’t help but feel betrayed. No “solution” to the problem was without embarrassment or grief, but Joseph had decided to privately dissolve the legal contract that was betrothal.

As he contemplated these things, Joseph fell asleep and dreamed. In his dream, an angel informed him that Mary had NOT been unfaithful! In fact, the woman to whom he was betrothed was actually going to give birth to the Messiah, the Savior of the people. Familiar with the prophecies of the Messiah in the Scriptures, many women had undoubtedly hoped that she would be the one to give birth to this Son of David. Now Joseph had learned that Mary would be the one.

In a relatively short period of time, Joseph likely went from the emotions of suspicion, despair, disappointment and perhaps even anger, to amazement and even perhaps ecstatic joy. How long had his people waited for their Savior?! Joseph did as he had been instructed by the angel in his dream and he took Mary as his wife.

It is unlikely that either Mary or Joseph was prepared for the days to come. No doubt there were some (many?) who would not believe the story of Joseph’s dream or the appearance of an angel to Mary. Even during the earliest years of Jesus, there was evidence that He was special. Herod would try to kill Him and Joseph would be compelled to flee with his family to Egypt.

On the stage of human history, Joseph and Mary played a special and unique role. After these announcements about the birth of the Messiah, their lives were undoubtedly never the same again.

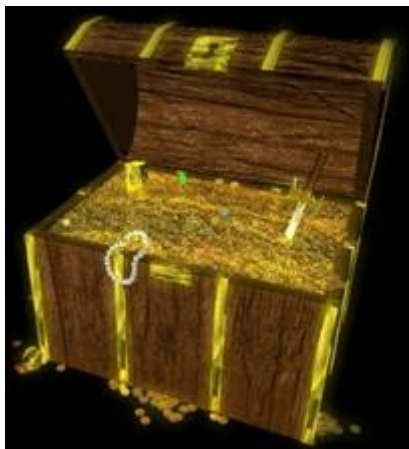
And once the Savior has come into our lives, we also are never to be the same again.

God Bless The Reader,
Allen

Date: September 2, 2009
Reading: Matthew 5-7

Who could possibly “out-Pharisee” the Pharisees? Yet Jesus said, “...unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20).

Our reading includes the entirety of the Lord’s sermon on the mount. Perhaps no other passage so completely describes the character of those who are citizens of the kingdom or calls us to a higher standard of behavior. It may be that the Lord’s teaching in this sermon is so startling because our natural tendency is to behave in a very different way.



The prize of eternal life is so valuable that nothing must be allowed to cause us to miss it. Pluck out my right eye? Cut off my right hand? I do NOT believe Jesus was teaching the effectiveness of physical mutilation in resisting sin; He used this hyperbolic language to indicate that we must let nothing stand in the way of obtaining eternal life (and avoiding the punishment of hell).

And, in fact, the moral demands required by kingdom citizenship will certainly involve sacrifice! If someone slaps me, I should turn the other cheek? If someone sues to take away my tunic, I should let him have my cloak also? Love my enemy, the one who wants to hurt me? Pray for those who persecute me? None of these instructions seem particularly fair; I am required to suffer injustice and hurt. However, if I wish to be like my heavenly Father, I will not love only those who love me first. He “makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good,” (5:45).

Evidently many of the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites. Our “righteousness” must not be like theirs, the kind that is done for effect – alms, prayers and fasting to be seen of men. Those who practice their righteousness for the praise of men have already gotten the only reward they will receive.

A man can only really have one master and physical riches can so easily become our master. Instead we must trust in God’s power and willingness to provide the physical things we need.

The sermon on the mount – truly a comprehensive set of moral principles! Are we hearers only?

Date: January 4, 2010
Reading: Matthew 5-6

Some actors in Hollywood command huge salaries because of their ability to “get into a role,” i.e., to assume the persona of a fictional character. They are rewarded handsomely for their efforts to pretend to be someone other than who they really are.



In His sermon on the mount, Jesus warned the people not to be “actors.” The word translated *hypocrite* originally referred to one who played a part in the theater. Jesus used the word to describe some religious people who performed their righteous deeds in the manner of a theatrical performance. He cautioned those listening to Him not to be as these actors, i.e., hypocrites, who “sounded a trumpet” before themselves when they did their charitable deeds (6:2). There doesn’t seem to be any historical evidence that Jews were literally blowing trumpets to attract attention to their deeds, but the figure of speech makes the point rather vividly. When they receive the attention of other men, however, these “actors” have received their full reward, the only reward they will get.

In contrast, not even the left hand should know what the right hand is doing when we do a “charitable deed” (6:3). The figure used by Jesus is striking because a person’s hands so often work together, but the emphasis is on secrecy.

This teaching of Jesus about the secrecy of our charitable deeds might be confusing at first because He had earlier instructed these same people to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (5:16). Should we let men see our good works or not?

The apparent difference between these passages serves to highlight the real issue: not whether men actually know about our good works, but rather our motivation for doing them. The hypocrite works to achieve self-notoriety, but the true disciple intends to bring glory to God. In our relationship with God, it is not just the “deed,” but the heart behind the action.

In short, stay after the good works, but lay off the trumpets!

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: January 5, 2010
Reading: Matthew 7-8

The person who contacted Jesus as He entered Capernaum was extraordinary (8:5). Capernaum was apparently the site of a detachment of Roman soldiers and one of them, a centurion, sought Jesus' aid.

There were several interesting things about this man noted in the synoptic gospels (see Luke 7:1-10). He was a Gentile, but apparently had some knowledge of Jesus. Jesus grew up as a youth in the village of Nazareth, but He moved to Capernaum after John was put into prison (4:12-13). Jesus' residency in Capernaum probably had provided the opportunity for the centurion to learn about Him.



The centurion was a compassionate man. The word translated **servant** is often used to designate a young slave, but the centurion cared about his servant. Rather than simply turn him out and find another to replace him, this soldier requested of Jesus that his servant be healed.

Matthew doesn't mention the intermediaries through whom the centurion contacted Jesus, but Luke notes that the centurion was a generous man who loved the Jewish nation. He had built a synagogue for the people and was well-respected by the elders of the city, an unusual thing for a Gentile.

I wonder if this man had heard Jesus preach in the streets of Capernaum or, as a God-fearer, heard Him teach in the synagogue. In some way, this centurion had surmised some very important things about Jesus. He understood the authority which Jesus wielded in the physical realm and comprehended that Jesus was also "under authority." He realized that Jesus' power was such that it was not even necessary for Him to be in the presence of the suffering servant in order to heal him, but could heal him simply by speaking a word.

Furthermore, he understood his relationship to Jesus. "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof" (8:8). Jesus marveled at the man and commended his faith. The centurion had commented on the authority/power of Jesus, but Jesus spoke of the man's faith, noting that its equal was not found among the Jews. This Roman soldier understood the implications of Jesus' authority and demonstrated his faith by coming to Jesus for help.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus described some at the final judgment who would refer to Him as "Lord", but fail to respect His authority (7:21-23). Let's live as those who are "under" the authority of Jesus!

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: September 3, 2009

Reading: Matthew 8-10

The verb “marvel” means “to become filled with surprise, wonder, or amazed curiosity” (Webster). The New King James translates that Jesus “marveled” when He heard the comment of the centurion (8:10). It is the same Greek word translated “marveled” in 8:27. What would it take to surprise or amaze the Son of God?

The centurion had pleaded with Jesus to heal his servant who was paralyzed. Jesus readily agreed to go and heal the servant, but the centurion didn’t deem himself worthy for Jesus to “come under [his] roof” (8:8). This soldier described himself as having authority over other soldiers and recognized that, like himself, Jesus was a person who had authority, except that Jesus’ authority was such that He could heal physical infirmities even from a distance.

The centurion was not an Jew, but the faith that he displayed was exceptional. He grasped what many of the Jews and even the disciples of Jesus did not understand (read 8:27 carefully).

Our reading is full of evidence of Jesus’ power/authority. A leper healed (8:3), the centurion’s servant healed (8:13), Peter’s mother relieved of her fever (8:15), a paralytic who walked (9:6-7), a ruler’s daughter raised from the dead (9:24-25), a woman healed of a flow of blood (9:22), two blind men who gained their sight (9:30) – in rapid fire, Matthew tells us of Jesus’ power.

Matthew also recorded that Jesus journeyed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and cast out demons who had possessed two men (8:28). These men were “exceedingly fierce,” so violent that no one could travel in the area where they were. The demons left the men and inhabited some swine who ran “violently” into the sea and drowned. The keepers of the swine fled, apparently afraid. Jesus pacified two men whom no one else could control.

It must have been so impressive to have seen the power of Jesus in the miracles that He performed. We see that same power in the ability of the gospel to heal the sinner.

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: January 6, 2010
Reading: Matthew 9-10

It is estimated that there are 100,000 hairs on the head of the average human being. Of course, that seems to vary with hair color (blondes actually have more hairs, on the average, than redheads) and age (and don't we know it!). Regardless of how many hairs each of us may have retained to this moment, Jesus said that every one (hair) is numbered (10:30).



I don't know the value of numbering the hairs of my head, but Jesus' comment was made in the context of "en-courage-ing" disciples to be faithful. He was giving reasons for us not to fear, but to be courageous in our service to God.

Jesus predicted to His disciples that they would be persecuted (10:16ff). Three times, however, He told them not to fear (10:26, 28, 31). One of the reasons to be courageous is God's care for us. He is conversant with even the most mundane or "little" things about us. That's the point of affirming that the very hairs of our head are numbered! Nothing in the world escapes His notice or care, not even the small sparrows (10:29; Luke 12:6). Jesus reminds us that we are more

valuable than many sparrows!

Earlier in our reading, a woman was healed of her affliction by touching the hem of the Lord's garment. Although the multitudes thronged and pressed Him as He walked, Jesus felt the touch of the woman who had a bleeding disorder (9:20-22; see Luke 8:43-48). So sensitive to the needs of others, Jesus distinguished between ordinary contact which was the result of people crowding near Him and the intentional touch of one who needed healing.

It is easier to face the "fears" of life when we know that God is aware and cares about what is "going on" in our lives. It is a wonderful spiritual blessing to be the express object of care on the part of the Creator of the universe.

"casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: September 4, 2009

Reading: Matthew 11-13

In chapter eleven, Matthew records that John the Baptizer was in prison and sent two of his disciples to Jesus. However, Matthew doesn't tell us about the circumstances of John's imprisonment until chapter fourteen (14:1-12). John was in prison because he had courageously rebuked Herod for the ruler's marriage to his brother Philip's wife.

It was John who had identified Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29-36). It was John who had heard the voice from heaven as he baptized Jesus, referring to Him as "My beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17). Yet he sent two disciples to inquire if Jesus was "the Coming One."



At the end of the reading, we learn that the people of Jesus' own country (Nazareth) were offended at His teaching in their synagogue (13:54-58). They knew Him as "the carpenter's son," the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Simon and Judas.

Jesus answered the question of John's disciples by pointing to the miracles that He was doing. Luke records that Jesus healed many people in that very hour (7:20-22). John's disciples were to tell their master what they had seen Jesus do. The works which Jesus performed and mentioned ("the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear..." – 11:5) were significant in that they constituted the fulfillment of prophecy (e.g., Isaiah 35:5-6). Jesus' works were to confirm to John that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Although John had evidence of Jesus' identity, he apparently developed doubts about Jesus because he was expecting a different kind of Messiah.

There were others who saw the works of Jesus, but they were unwilling to admit the significance of the evidence. Jesus healed a man with a withered hand (12:9-13) and exorcised a demon from a man who had become blind and mute as a result of the demon possession (12:22). Rather than believe the works of Jesus, the Pharisees plotted to destroy Jesus and accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan (Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons – 12:14, 24).

In chapter thirteen, Jesus told the story of a sower who cast seed onto various types of soils (13:3-9). The Pharisees illustrated rather well the character of the wayside soil. What kind of soil are we?

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: January 7, 2010
Reading: Matthew 11-12

He belonged to Satan. Not so much from the standpoint of his behavior (although he was most assuredly a sinner), but due to the fact that his physical body was possessed by a demon(s). The poor man was blind and couldn't speak (12:22). What a physical prison to have to inhabit!

But someone brought this man under the power of Satan to Jesus who "healed" him and the man "both spoke and saw." The exorcism of the demon(s) who had possessed this man amazed the multitudes, causing them to speculate that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of David (12:23). The Pharisees would have none of that! When they heard about the surmising of the crowd, they claimed that Jesus had actually cast out the demon by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, i.e., Satan.

The comments of Jesus which followed were evidently not just "about the Pharisees," but were spoken TO the Pharisees, whose ruminations Jesus understood perfectly. The Lord first pointed out the illogical nature of the Pharisees' charge. He began with a recognized principle: "every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation." Why would Satan cast out Satan, i.e., the demon(s) who possessed the man in question? Satan would be working against himself. How could his kingdom stand (12:25-26)?

He continued by noting the unjust partiality of their charge in light of the deeds (claims?) of others whom they approved (12:27).

Finally He pressed the consequence of His casting out the demon(s) by means of an illustration. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his good without first binding the strong man. By casting out the demon(s), Jesus had entered Satan's "house" and plundered it, taking away from him the man whose physical body had been under the control of the demon(s) to some degree.

What a relief that man must have felt! To be free of Satan's power over his physical body must have been exhilarating! Jesus' dominance over Satan in the matter of demon possession was illustrative of the defeat which awaited the evil one (Luke 11:4) at the cross. By means of that sacrificial death, Jesus destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Satan was not annihilated at the cross; he continues to wage war against the Lamb and His saints, but in point of fact, the forgiveness of our sins means that he has been plundered.

Exhilarating, don't you think?

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: January 8, 2010
Reading: Matthew 13-14

In a series of parables, Jesus spoke to the people about the nature of the kingdom (rule) of heaven. He told the parable of the tares (13:24-30), the parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32), the parable of the leavened dough (13:33), the parable of the hidden treasure (13:44), the parable of the pearl merchant (13:45-46) and the parable of the dragnet (13:47-50).



In the parable of the hidden treasure, Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was like “treasure hidden in a field.” In the days of Jesus, it was not uncommon for men to conceal and protect their accumulated wealth by burying it in the ground. Remember the one-talent man in a later parable told by Jesus; he hid in the ground the money given to his stewardship by his master (Matthew 25:25).

In the parable that Jesus told about the kingdom, a man found just such a buried treasure and hid it.

He then sold everything that he had in order to have the money to buy the field containing the treasure.

The point of the parable is that being a part of the kingdom of heaven is so valuable that men should make whatever sacrifice is necessary to enter it. The man in the parable understood that he would have to give up what he presently had in order to obtain something worth far more. It is crucial to the point of the parable to understand that this man recognized the value of the treasure he had found.

Life is full of such decisions. Keep what we have...or give it up for something else more valuable. Sometimes men make poor judgments about the relative value of things, foolishly choosing to hold on to the less valuable and forfeiting any claim to the priceless. So many have traded their hope of heaven for a few moments of physical pleasure.

As Christians, we must be careful that we don't give up something priceless to obtain the relatively worthless. The land now known as Manhattan, the center of New York City, was purchased from the Lenape Indians for a mere pittance in comparison to the ultimate value of the land.

How many sons of God have given up their hope of eternal life for the baubles and trinkets of this life? What kinds of “trades” will we make today?

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: September 5, 2009

Reading: Matthew 14-17

When Jesus came to the land of Gennesaret, He was recognized by some of the people of the region and they brought all of their sick to Jesus, begging only to touch the hem of His garment (14:34-36). No more than simple contact with His garment was enough to be healed perfectly!

Jesus traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon, apparently to temporarily escape the crowds (see Mark 7:24). But there was a Canaanite woman who recognized Him and she cried out for Him to have mercy on her by healing her daughter who was “severely demon-possessed.” Jesus didn’t answer her. The woman followed Jesus and His disciples, continuing to cry out and beg for mercy.

The disciples asked Jesus to send her away. She was creating a scene! It might appear that the disciples were asking Jesus to just get rid of her, but Jesus’ response (vs. 24) suggests that they were wanting Him to grant her request and satisfy her so that she would just go away. The New Jerusalem Bible translates, “But he said not a word in answer to her. And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.’”

The woman came and worshiped Jesus, asking for His help. Jesus replied to her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” The expression “little dogs” is not one of derision, as though Jesus was referring to this Gentile woman as a “dog” – a term of contempt which might have been used by some Jews to describe Gentiles, nor does it appear that He had in mind the unclean nature of a dog. The expression “little dog” seems rather to refer to a pet dependent on its owner for food (see verse 27 – “their masters’ table”). It appears that Jesus was affirming that the blessings of the Messiah were to be enjoyed *first* by the Jews.

You have to admire this woman! Some people might have given up, others would have perhaps been offended by the reference to “little dogs” incorrectly concluding that Jesus was exhibiting an attitude of condescension. But this woman understood what Jesus said and noted, in reply, that sometimes the “little dogs” get to eat crumbs from the table even as their masters ate!

When the woman first cried out to Jesus, she called Him the “Son of David,” probably an indication that she understood that He was the Messiah. Furthermore, she came and worshiped Him (vs. 25). She desired the cure of her daughter, just “a crumb from the table” of blessings that Jesus was setting for the Jews!

The centurion wanted “just a word” (8:8); the people of Gennesaret begged for just a touch of the hem of His garment and the Canaanite mother desired “just a crumb from the table.” They all recognized the authority of Jesus. Do we have such “great faith” (15:28)?

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: January 9, 2010
Reading: Matthew 15-16

The scribes and Pharisees were critical of Jesus' disciples because they did not wash their hands according to the traditions of the elders (rabbis) prior to eating bread. Jesus eventually would comment on the true source of "defilement," but He began His response by charging these critics with "transgressing the commandment of God because of their tradition" (15:10-11, 3).

It was God who had commanded, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). It was the fifth commandment of the Decalogue and pretty simple to understand. The Jews understood the honoring of one's parents to possibly include financial support (see 1 Timothy 5 for this understanding of "honor" in the language of the apostle Paul).

Jesus said, however, that the scribes and Pharisees taught that a man "need not honor his father or mother" under certain circumstances (15:5-6). How could anyone begin with a positive responsibility from God and end up advocating the exact opposite behavior, with the belief that such was pleasing to God?

If I understand correctly, the rabbis of the Jews had reasoned in this way. If a man chooses to devote his possessions to the service of God, they become holy (Leviticus 27:9-10, 28). It would be improper to use "holy" things, assets dedicated to God, for the purpose of supporting one's parents; that would be tantamount to putting parents ahead of God!

Apparently the error of the rabbis was even more egregious than simply arraying a divine commandment against another provision of the Law. A "loophole" was created by the rabbinical tradition that one did not have to actually give devoted assets to the Lord; they could be retained and used by their owner, but it remained improper to use said assets for helping needy parents! Their interpretation of Leviticus 27 was used as a basis for disobeying God's commandment to honor parents.

Jesus said that they had taken a commandment of God and made it "of no effect" by their tradition (15:6). He applied the language of Isaiah to such people, noting that they honored God with their lips (in word only), but their hearts were far from Him (15:8-9). It does not appear that God intended for the dedication of assets to Him to relieve His people from obeying the command to honor father and mother. Whatever these scribes and Pharisees might have said in the way of praise, reverence and honor to God, the truth was that their hearts were not at all in tune with God's.

The consequence of the teaching of tradition ("the commandments of men") as doctrine, i.e., divinely-given responsibility is that our worship becomes vain. It is inconsistent to offer reverence to God through worship while treating God's word as no greater than that of men.

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: January 11, 2010

Reading: Matthew 17-18

Oh, to have experienced the things that Peter did! Our reading has Peter in the middle of things (naturally). He was with Jesus when Elijah and Moses appeared on the mountain of transfiguration. He witnessed Jesus healing an epileptic boy after the disciples (probably including Peter) were unable to perform the deed. At Jesus' instruction, he got money to pay the temple tax for Jesus and himself from the mouth of a fish. He was being taught by Jesus all along, but he received what must have been astonishing teaching about greatness, the value of a human soul, and the absolute necessity of forgiveness

What can we learn along with Peter from the Master Teacher?

- 1) We need to hear and obey and worship Jesus. Elijah and Moses were transcendent characters who were great leaders of God's people, but they are not deity. We are to heed the voice from heaven: Listen to God's Son!
- 2) Faith is an indescribably powerful quality, ascribed the ability to move mountains. We may be stopped because of unbelief, but with faith (manifested prayer and fasting in this passage) nothing will be impossible.
- 3) Jesus demonstrated His miraculous power in yet another way – one that taught Peter the lesson intended. Deity took care of His (un-owed) temple tax in a remarkable way – and took care of Peter in the process.
- 4) Greatness in the kingdom is not based on prestigious position or riches, but rather on purity and humility.
- 5) It's all about forgiveness. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. One that is lost takes on more importance than ninety-nine who are safe. Saving someone may require unpleasant discipline, and to be forgiven, we must willingly extend forgiveness to penitent offenders.

May we always be willing to listen to the Master!

Enjoy the reading.

Tim

Date: September 7, 2009

Reading: Matthew 18-21

The idea of “greatness in the kingdom” appears a number of times in our reading today. Greatness by man’s standards can be based on position, wealth, knowledge, or strength. Man’s concept of greatness is one that apparently affected the apostles. Consider Jesus’ teaching as He shaped their thinking about greatness in the kingdom.

Greatness in the kingdom requires conversion, the conversion brought about by childlike humility (18:2-4). To help reinforce that idea, Jesus welcomed little children to come to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, in spite of the protests of the apostles (19:13-15).

Greatness in the kingdom isn’t based on wealth. Jesus showed this clearly in His instructions to the rich young ruler, who was religious and desired to do some good (or great) thing. This man lacked one thing that he was unwilling to give (19:21-22).

Greatness is not determined by position in the kingdom. When James and John’s mother lobbied for her sons to have positions of importance and influence, Jesus turned the discussion to sacrifice. The one who desires to be first must be the servant of all. We must follow the example of Jesus, who came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many (20:20-28).

Often we argue about greatness in kingdom because we forget that we are servants of the King. Matthew 21 presents the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, as the multitudes hailed Him as King. He is the One who is to be praised and honored!

So as you read, please note that greatness in the kingdom of God is based on service, humility, and sacrifice. Seek greatness in the kingdom today!

Happy reading,

Tim

Date: January 12, 2010

Reading: Matthew 19-20

Do you want to do what is right? Sometimes doing the right thing is hard and it will go against your natural instincts. Consider the following examples from our reading:

1) God's law concerning marriage is challenging. Marriage is a lifelong commitment involving the melding of two personalities in a relationship. God joins two into one; man should not separate the two. Only the exceptional circumstance of marital infidelity provides a legitimate cause for divorce and acceptable remarriage, and that only for the innocent party. Jesus' disciples were amazed (19:10) and commented that it would be better not to marry! Compare this teaching to our society's lax views on marriage with divorce as an always available option and no conditions placed on remarriage. Doing the right thing is not the easy thing.

2) God's word concerning commitment is hard. In telling the young man what he needed to do to have eternal life, Jesus required more than he was willing to give. The young man was unwilling to place Jesus ahead of his possessions. Jesus' comment on the difficulty of a rich man being saved evoked from His disciples the question: "Who then can be saved?" The disciples had left all to follow Jesus. All He requires is our total commitment. That's hard!

3) Men desire recognition, position, and service from others. Rather than promising positions of prominence in the kingdom to James and John, He offered them a share of His cup of suffering. All disciples of Jesus must take the same position – that of servant to others. No ego-boasting position awaits us, but serving others as we serve God is our position if we're going to please God. That's hard!

Make it your challenge today to do the right thing, even if it is hard!

May God bless us as we read and apply.

Tim

Date: January 13, 2010

Reading: Matthew 21-22

“There is no stronger bond of friendship than a mutual enemy.” (quote attributed to Frankfort Moore).

Jesus entry into Jerusalem to the adulation of the multitude gave way to confrontation with different groups. What you should notice as you read is the odd mixture of groups that challenged Him. The conflict between Jesus and the leaders of the people was nearing its climax, and the leaders were looking for a way to turn the multitudes against Him. They were incensed at the adoration He received as He entered Jerusalem (21:15).

The following groups in succession confronted Jesus:

- The chief priests and elders of the people challenged Him on authority (21:23).
- The chief priests and Pharisees sought to lay hands on Him (21:45-46).
- The Pharisees and Herodians confronted Him with a tax question (22:15-17).
- The Saducees followed up with a question about the resurrection (22:23).
- The Pharisees, after hearing Jesus’ response to the Saducees, came with a question about the great commandment in the law (22:34-35).

These groups, normally at odds with and arguing with one another, were seeking to discredit Him and turn the multitudes against Jesus. Jesus’ responses confounded (21:25-26: 22:22,33) and ultimately silenced them (22:46). Jesus was in control of the situation as His final week played out. His enemies sought to gain an advantage against Him but were unsuccessful.

Do I challenge Jesus’ authority? Do I team with His enemies? Do I listen to Him and obey His teaching? Am I Jesus’ friend or enemy? How I deal with His authority will provide the answer to these questions.

May God bless us as we read and apply.

Tim

Date: September 8, 2009

Reading: Matthew 22-25

Today's reading is ripe with many lessons. The hypocrisy of the religious leaders in chapter 23, the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 24, and the scenes of judgment in chapter 25 would all be worthy topics. However, what I want to draw your attention to is Jesus' interaction with the Saducees in chapter 22.

This is the chapter where Jesus "takes on all comers" as they present dilemmas for which any answer will provoke a negative reaction. The Herodians and Pharisees came together and challenged Him with a tax question. The Pharisees questioned Him about the greatest law. His answers were masterful and left them marveling (vs. 22).

The Saducees raised a sticky question based on their belief system (no resurrection, no angels, no spirit – Acts 23:8). They introduced a hypothetical situation about a woman who had seven brothers in succession as her husband (in keeping with Moses' law to provide offspring for the first brother). Whose wife would she be in the resurrection? This was apparently a question for which their Pharisee friends had no answer.

Jesus went right to the core of the question. He gave the Saducees an answer based on scripture that undermined their basic assumptions. Rather than accept their premise on the afterlife that would require the untangling of this hopelessly complex situation, Jesus asserted that they were mistaken, knowing neither the scriptures nor the power of God. Jesus stated that the woman would be like the angels (whom they didn't believe in) and be unmarried in the resurrection. But the argument that silenced them was the next one. Jesus made an argument based on the tense of a verb in a single verse in a book that had been written 1500 years before. He showed that when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush He stated that "I am" the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:16) – men who had been dead for hundreds of years. Not WAS, but AM! God is not the God of the dead, but of the living! The multitudes were amazed, and the Saducees were silenced.

Jesus had confidence in the integrity of scripture preserved through the years, confidence enough to base this profound argument on the tense of a verb. We can have similar confidence in the word preserved through the years that it is accurate and trustworthy. Let's make it our aim to be diligent students of the word, so that we can "handle aright the word of truth."

Enjoy the reading,

Tim

Date: January 15, 2010

Reading: Matthew 25-26

What is important? Let me briefly suggest some things that are important – maybe more than we think.

- Being prepared is important. Preparation requires some planning ahead and thus being wise (25:4).
- Being diligent in the responsibility assigned you is important. Doing your tasks to the best of your ability is what the Lord desires (25:14-15, 21, 23, 29).
- Being compassionate and caring for those less fortunate is important. Providing for others in need is credited as service to the Master and will receive His reward (25:34-40).
- Giving our best to the Master is important. It may appear wasteful even in the eyes of some of Jesus' disciples, but giving our best to the Master will not go unnoticed. Our best may be nothing "showy" or it may not be appreciated by many, but it will be appreciated by the One who matters (26:6-13).
- Watching and praying is important. It was the only thing Jesus requested of His disciples in the garden, but it was something they failed to do. Without vigilance and prayer, they were susceptible to upcoming temptation (26:38-46).

Let's remember to do what's important today!

May God bless us as we read and apply.

Tim

Date: September 9, 2009

Reading: Matthew 26-28

The love of God is so amazing! Today's reading takes us through man's darkest action – the pre-meditated murder of the Son of God. Rather than being the act that would finally cause God to say "Enough!" and destroy mankind because of their evil deeds, it was the vehicle to bring man back into His fellowship.

Note the following as you read:

See how the religious leaders acted. They plotted to trick Jesus and capture Him after the feast. They recruited one of His apostles to betray Him. When He was arrested, they were the ones who assembled the mob and sought false witnesses to testify against Him. They condemned Him to death because of blasphemy. They accused Jesus as He was before the Roman governor and persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. They even mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross. They persuaded Pilate to secure the tomb with a guard. After the resurrection, they bribed the guards to say that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus as they slept.

See how Jesus' apostles acted. Judas took money, betrayed Jesus, returned the money, and then went and killed Himself. Peter professed undying loyalty, protested the notion that he would deny Jesus, slept while Jesus prayed, defended then deserted Jesus, and finally denied Him three times. The other apostles fled. It took the resurrection to bring them back together.

Contrast the actions of these two groups with the actions of Jesus. What love and patience on display! The Creator allowing His creation to put Him to death on the cross, suffering all alone – for me! But He did not stay in the grave! "He is not here; for He is risen..."

Enjoy the reading,

Tim