

**Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church**  
**Reading Together**  
**December 6 - 12**

**Monday, December 05 – Matthew 26: 36 – 68**

After celebrating the Passover with his disciples, Jesus went to a quiet spot to pray, and prepare himself for what was about come. The wheels are in motion and the time has come for Jesus to go to the cross. Jesus knew what lay ahead of him. It wasn't fear of the physical pain or torture that gripped and overwhelmed him. It was fear of facing all of the wrath of God being poured out on him for our sins—that is what terrified him, and that is why he went to the garden to pray. The cup that Jesus refers to in verse 42 is the cup of God's wrath that will soon be poured out on him, and the thought of facing that so terrified Jesus that, quite frankly, Jesus is looking for a way out. But there is none. Notice, as Jesus is praying, his disciples are sleeping. Is it any wonder that Jesus was able to stand up to the temptation to turn while the disciples run away when their own moment of temptation comes (Peter disowned Jesus, but most of the other disciples ran and hid after Jesus was arrested)?

God didn't answer Jesus' prayer in the Garden to find another way because there was no other way. Understanding that, Jesus moved forward to the cross. Notice how when the soldiers (think of them as police who served the Pharisees) come to arrest him, the disciples try to defend Jesus with swords, but Jesus tells them to put them away. Notice what Jesus says in verse 53. If he wanted to he could call in 12 legions of angels (72,000) to defend him, but knowing that it was the Father's will to crush him for our sins, he allowed himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter.

As the Pharisees put Jesus on trial they are not even able to find two witnesses who agree as to what Jesus has done wrong (in Jewish law two witnesses had to agree exactly in order for someone to be found guilty). The two who finally are able to agree actually distort Jesus' words from John 2: 19. Jesus did not say he would destroy the temple. He said that if they destroyed the temple (referring to Jesus' body) that Jesus would raise it up again in three days. Finally, Jesus gives them what they need to convict him, by saying something that they consider to be blasphemy. Jesus admits the truth that he is indeed the Christ,

the Messiah, and one day they will see him reigning with the Father in glory.

## **Tuesday, December 06 – Matthew 26: 69 – 27: 10**

In today's reading we see two men who both failed—Judas who betrayed Jesus, and Peter who denied Jesus. It is easy to think that Judas was the worst of the two and what he did was somehow unforgivable, while what Peter did was bad, but forgivable. The question is was one sin more forgivable than the other, or is there another reason why Peter would be reinstated as a disciple (John 21) and Judas went and hung himself in shame? Both were sorry for their sin (Peter – 26:75, Judas – 27:3), but only one was willing to truly repent. **2 Corinthians 7:10** *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”* While Judas felt sorrow over his sin, he refused to repent, and as a result he died in his sin. Peter, after struggling for a while with his sin on his own, turned to Jesus and repented. Repentance is more than just being sorry for our sin—it is turning away from our sin and turning to Jesus. In time Peter did that, but Judas didn't.

## **Wednesday, December 07 – Matthew 27: 11 – 44**

In today's reading, we see Jesus continuing to be humiliated as he made his way to the cross. First, Jesus is turned over to the Roman Governor Pilate, because the Jews did not have the power to put anyone to death without the Roman authorities sanctioning it. Notice Pilate can find nothing wrong that Jesus has done, and he tries desperately to find a way out of condemning an innocent man. But the Jews would not allow him a way out. Pilate is fearful that if he does not allow Jesus to be killed that the Jews will riot, which would be a black mark on his governorship. Does Pilate's actions of symbolically washing his hands relieve him of responsibility? It might have eased his conscience, but it doesn't absolve him of responsibility, because ultimately his inaction denied Jesus justice. Imagine how humiliating it must have been for Jesus to stand there condemned, an innocent man, beaten and bloodied, while a notorious criminal is released in his place. But that is just the beginning of his humiliation. Jesus is taken from Pilate's presence, beaten, spit on, and mocked, and then is taken to the

cross—the ultimate humiliation. He was hung there to die, virtually naked, smeared with our sins and God’s wrath poured out on him. Even as he hangs there the humiliation continues. Those who pass by hurl insults at him. Notice as you read this, that all of Jesus’ humiliation revolves around his claim to be the Messiah or King of the Jews. The major theme of Matthew’s Gospel is that Jesus is the Messiah, and even though people may not have understood that, and even though it was what led to his crucifixion, Matthew proves throughout his Gospel that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

### **Thursday, December 08 – Matthew 27: 45 – 66**

There are several events surrounding Jesus’ death that Matthew makes a point of including in his Gospel that we should be sure to take note of as we read today’s reading. Some of these have been brought to our attention in the other Gospel accounts, but they are so important to our understanding of what Jesus did for us on the cross that it is good for us to think about them every time we have the opportunity to do so. Let’s start by looking at verse 46 when Jesus cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” What did Jesus mean by those words? Jesus wasn’t just feeling that God had forgotten him as he was hanging there on the cross dying. It was more than that. For the first time ever, in all of eternity, God the Father was turning his back on God the Son, and it was because the Son, Jesus, had been defiled and become unholy, because he took on our sin as he hung on the cross.

But while Jesus is taking our sin to the cross another amazing thing happens. Mathew tells us in verse 51 that the curtain in the temple was torn in two. This curtain was what separated the main area of the temple from the Holy of Holies, which was the sacred place where God made his dwelling. It was so holy that only the High Priest was allowed to enter it and then only once a year. The tearing of this curtain symbolized that through Jesus’ death on the cross, a way was made for believers in Christ’s atoning sacrifice to have to direct access into God’s presence.

There is a third thing that only Matthew records and is found in verse 52. In this verse, Matthew tells us that when Jesus died the tombs of holy people opened up and they were raised to life again. It is easy to question this because Matthew is the only one who records it; however, keep this in mind, Matthew’s Gospel was written shortly after Jesus died, and it was written to a Jewish audience. This audience would

have known what happened the day Jesus died, and if Matthew were not being truthful, his Gospel would have been discredited and rejected by the early church as well as the Jews he was writing his Gospel to.

Matthew's Gospel is also the only Gospel account to record the fact that guards were ordered to guard the grave out of fear that someone would try to come and steal Jesus' body. They were very aware of Jesus' claim that he would rise again in three days. They didn't believe it, but they were aware of it. The Pharisees knew that if Jesus' body was taken from the grave and people believed he had risen from the dead he would become even more popular than he was (verse 64). They posted a guard and sealed the tomb, but that was no match for the resurrection power of God at work in Jesus (Ephesians 1: 18-20).

### **Friday, December 9 – Matthew 28: 1 – 20**

Matthew's account of the resurrection and its aftermath is shorter than the other Gospel accounts, but it is loaded with vivid detail of the tomb being opened. Matthew also includes the detail of the cover-up that was concocted by the Pharisees and the Roman soldiers, who had guarded the tomb for them. Rather than being amazed at the resurrection, they do everything in their power to discredit and cover it up. If you understand this, you can begin to understand that the resurrection has to be a historical fact, because even with the attempted cover-up they could do nothing to discredit it.

Matthew closes his Gospel with the Great Commission, that tells us that we, as followers of Christ, are to go to all the nations, spread the Gospel, and make disciples. This is not just a commission for some believers, it is a commission for every believer.

### **Saturday, December 10 – Revelation 1**

The Book of Revelation was written by Jesus' disciple John sometime between 70 and 90 AD, or 40 to 60 years after Jesus died. John was in exile on a small island in the Mediterranean Sea, because he was a leader in the Christian movement. There are many who seek to try to interpret every sign and symbol in the book in an effort to try to figure out the exact date and manner in which Jesus will return. The problem with this approach is that Jesus said that even he did not know the date or the hour of his return (Matthew 24: 36). Rather than trying to figure out things that we can only guess at, we will focus on the things we can

be sure of: Jesus is going to return, and Jesus will be victorious. I would urge you as you read through this book to try not to get lost in some of the details, but instead always keep the big picture in front of you.

Revelation 1 sets the scene in which the rest of the book of Revelation takes place. Notice how verse 1 introduces this book. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ that is given to John by an angel. Notice also what verse 3 tells us. We will be blessed as a result of reading this. What does that mean? It means that, as we read this, we will be reminded of Jesus' return, which in turn will remind us that every struggle we endure for Christ will be worth the effort.

The next verses contain various statements about the Trinity. Verse 4 starts by speaking of God's eternality. The seven spirits mentioned in this verse are probably a reference to the Holy Spirit (the number 7 is symbolic of completion in the Bible). Verse 5 refers to Jesus as the faithful witness—the one who was sent from the courtroom of heaven to bear witness to the world about the Kingdom of Heaven. Notice how verse 5 also refers to Jesus as the King of Kings. Think how comforting it would be for those who were undergoing persecution for their faith in Christ to know that Jesus, their first born elder brother, is the ultimate king. Verse 6 reminds us of what Jesus has done for us—he has loved us, freed us from our sins and made us part of the kingdom of heaven. Verse 7 pictures this king of kings returning to one day to bring justice to the world because of their sin (that is why the world mourns).

In verses 9-20, John records what he sees while he is in the spirit. He sees seven golden lampstands (which represent the churches—verse 20), and someone like a son of man. This is clearly a picture of Jesus. Notice Jesus words in verses 17-18. There is no doubt based on what this one who is like the son of man says that this is Jesus. Notice the description of Jesus. Eyes like blazing fire—seeing everything and angry about what he sees. In his right hand he holds seven stars (again based on verse 20 these seven stars represent the seven angels [or messengers, which could also mean pastors] of the seven churches). This is symbolic of Jesus' protection of those who belong to him. The double edged sword, which comes out of his mouth, is the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). Everything else about Jesus' description is glowing or radiant because God is radiant and Jesus is the exact representation of God to us.

## **Sunday, December 11 – Revelation 2**

Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation are letters that Jesus dictated to the apostle John to seven churches in Asia Minor. While the letters are specific to these churches, they also apply to us because we are just like them and we live in the same world they lived in—just in a different time. The first letter is to the church in Ephesus. Paul also wrote a letter to this church which is included in our Bibles as the Book of Ephesians. Look at verses 2 and 3. This is a hard working church that is doing its best to remain true to God's Word. However, when we look at verse 4, we see that they have forgotten their first love, which means that while they have been busy doing everything else they have forgotten Jesus. Jesus' threat in verse 5 to remove their lampstand means that Jesus will leave their presence. They may continue to be a church, but if they do not repent and return to their first love, Jesus won't be part of it any longer.

Verses 8-11 are the letter Jesus dictates for the church in Smyrna. This church is facing persecution for their faith in Christ. They have been shut out of the economic activity in the city and are being persecuted by the Jews (synagogue of Satan). Jesus simply encourages them to be faithful and persevere so that they can receive the crown of life.

The third letter Jesus dictates is to the church in Pergamum and it is found in verses 12-17. This church is located in a place filled with Satanic activity (verse 17), but is remaining true to Jesus, even though one of its leaders (Faithful Antipas verse 13) was put to death for his faith. However, this church has a problem—it is allowing people in the church to follow false teachings that probably also involved various forms of sexual immorality (Balaam taught by Balak [Numbers 22] and the Nicolaitans).

Verses 18-29 are the letter Jesus dictated to the church in Thyatira. This church also was faithful and dedicated (verse 19), but it also was allowing false teaching, which probably also involved immorality to creep into its congregation (Jezebel is probably not really the woman's name who is promoting this false teaching, but probably a reference to wicked Queen Jezebel in 2 Kings). Jesus implores this church to hold onto what they have (verse 25) and promises them that if they do, they will one day have authority (along with all believers) over the nations of the world.