

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading
November 7 – November 13

Monday, November 07 – Matthew 10: 1 – 42

Now that the disciples have spent time with Jesus, they are prepared to go out and begin to minister in his name. But before they go, Jesus gives them very specific instructions about where they are to go and what they are to do. His first instruction is found in verses 5 and 6 where Jesus tells them to only go to the Jews with the message of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus earthly ministry was very much focused on Israel, but once the Jews rejected Jesus and crucified him, the gospel opens the Kingdom of Heaven for all to come and be a part of. This was all part of God's plan, because before Jesus could be savior for the nations of the world, he first had to be rejected and crucified by the Jews. Next, in verses 7-10, Jesus tells the disciples what to take with them and what they are to do. Simply put, they are to copy Jesus (there is a lesson there for us!). They are not to take anything with them, but they are to rely on God working through his people to supply their needs, and they are to bring the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven to all that they meet through both word and deed.

In the remaining verses of today's reading Jesus tells his disciple what they are in for. They will be welcomed in some homes and those homes will be blessed for their hospitality (verses 11-13). They will be rejected by others, and Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about rejection, but to just shake the dust of the town off of their feet and move on to the next town (verses 14-16). Shaking the dust off your feet as you left a home or a town was a sign of protest that you wanted nothing more to do with that town (you didn't even want its dust with you as reminder of your visit there).

Jesus goes on to warn his disciples of what lies ahead for them. He tells them that they shouldn't be surprised at this, because they are his students and the same things have happened to the teacher (verses 24-25). They will be dragged into court and be persecuted for their faith in Christ, but they are not to worry when that happens, because the Holy Spirit will give them the courage and the ability to speak boldly and wisely (verses 17-20). Jesus tells them that there is nothing that can happen to them that God does not know of and allow, and for enduring persecution on earth they will be rewarded in heaven (verses 26-33).

Jesus says some other very interesting things in these verses that we should address. The first of these things we should address are found

in verses 21-23 and 34-36. Notice in these verses Jesus doesn't talk about bringing peace but division. That goes against the way we normally think of Jesus, but Jesus came to bring the Kingdom of Heaven, and for that to happen the kingdom of this world must be brought down. The kingdom of this world will not give up without a fight, so that is why Jesus speaks this way. Jesus makes it very clear that no matter what the cost we must be sure that we are part of the Kingdom of Heaven because that is the only place where we will find eternal reward (verses 37 – 42).

Tuesday, November 08 – Matthew 11: 1 – 24

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for Jesus, but after John was put in prison he began to have some doubts about Jesus, so he sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus if Jesus was the real deal. Notice how closely Jesus' answer to them in verses 4 – 6 parallels what Jesus just said in all of chapter 10. The proof that Jesus was the messiah laid in the fact of the things Jesus did, the very same things he told his disciple to do in Matthew 10: 7 – 8. Also in one verse (6), Jesus sums up a good portion of what he said in chapter 10 about the need to persevere even in the face of persecution.

After John the Baptist's disciples leave, Jesus addresses the crowd and gives testimony to the fact that John the Baptist was a great prophet. In fact in verse 11, Jesus says that John the Baptist was the greatest prophet ever born of a woman, because he actually got to witness what he had prophesied about. But then in verses 11 - 15, Jesus says something very interesting. He says that even the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist, and this is because those who become part of the Kingdom of Heaven through Christ's death on the cross actually get to experience the power of the cross in their own lives, which John the Baptist never got to do. Keep in mind though that just as Abraham, Moses and David are part of the kingdom of Heaven, so too is John the Baptist. But what Jesus is saying is that even though they were able to see what was to come in Christ, they never got to experience it in their own lives like we do.

As we close out today's reading, we hear Jesus address the crowds refusal to repent and believe. When John the Baptist came they said his behavior was so strange he was demon possessed. When Jesus came they accused him of being a friend to sinners. To their own harm they rejected both the messenger and the message.

Wednesday, November 9 –Matthew 11: 25 – 12: 14

Today's reading deals with the subject of rest—real rest for our souls. Jesus invites us to stop practicing religion and come and experience him (verses 28 - 30). We can rest in Christ because Jesus has done what we can't ever do for ourselves. He has lived the perfect life we should have lived and then he died the death we deserved to die. He invites us to come and rest in his completed work of righteousness for us. Because of Christ we are more than just forgiven, we are also righteous in God's sight and we can find rest in that righteousness. That is what Jesus meant when he cried on the cross, "It is finished."

There was no rest for a Jew in Jesus' day, because the Pharisees had led people down with all kinds of additional regulations and laws that they claimed needed to be followed for a person to be righteous. We see a clear example of this in chapter 12. The very act of plucking a few heads of grain as you walked through a grain field and then rubbing the kernels together to get to the seed inside was considered by the Pharisees to be working on the Sabbath.

Even healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath was considered to be unnecessary work. Jesus points out their hypocrisy, because they would work to help an animal in distress but not another person. The heart of the matter is what is in our heart (verse 7).

Thursday, November 10 – Matthew 12: 15 – 37

As Matthew continues to tell us about Jesus' ministry, he also continues to make connections to Old Testament prophecies. In verses 15 and 16, Matthew tells us that Jesus withdrew to a more secluded area, but there were many who came and found him so they could be healed. Jesus had withdrawn because he did not want the Jewish leaders to kill him before God's appointed time, and he did not want the people to take him by force and make him their earthly king. Even as Jesus withdrew he did not turn away from those in need. In verses 18 – 21, Matthew quotes from Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 42:1-4) concerning the Messiah. Notice how this prophecy emphasizes both the work of Jesus and the gentleness of Jesus.

In verses 22 – 24, we get a glimpse into why Jesus had withdrawn, because even as he heals people and does good for them, he is attacked. After Jesus drives out a demon that had caused a man to be both blind and mute, the Pharisees accuse him of doing it by Satan's power. Jesus addresses their thoughts in verses 25 – 32, by pointing out their stupidity to think that Jesus could use Satan's power to drive out Satan. Why would Satan work against himself? To make his point about what is happening Jesus tells a mini parable in verse 29, about

how to rob the house of a strong man. In this parable Satan is the strong man and the house is the world, and Jesus is saying that he has come to bind Satan and then ransack his house, so that he can take Satan's possessions and make them his own.

In verses 31 and 32, Jesus talks about the one unpardonable sin—blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Many people wonder what that means, and very simply it is what you see the Pharisees doing in this passage. It is attributing the work and power of the Holy Spirit to the power of Satan. Everything Jesus did he did through the power of the Holy Spirit, so to try to discredit it by saying it was done with Satan's power was unforgivable. Jesus ends this confrontation with the Pharisees by pointing out that the words they say points out the evil that is in their heart (verses 33-37).

Friday, November 11 – Matthew 12: 38 – 50

In verse 38, the Pharisees ask Jesus to do something miraculous so that they can tell for sure if he is the Messiah or not. What they are looking for is something so big and miraculous that it would leave no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. But if Jesus had done something like that rather than crucifying him, which was God's plan all along, they would have crowned him as their earthly king. So rather than giving them what they ask for, Jesus tells them that the only sign they will get is the sign of Jonah. If you remember Jonah's story in the Old Testament, Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale before he was miraculously spit out on the beach. In the same way, Jesus is saying that he will be laid in the belly of the earth (the grave) before he is miraculously resurrected to new life. This would be the sign that they were asking for. But as we will see, even when Jesus is raised from the dead, they still will refuse to believe because of the hardness of their hearts.

In verses 43 – 45, Jesus tells another very brief parable about a man who has an evil spirit driven out of him, but then the evil spirit returns and possesses the man in an even more powerful way. To understand what Jesus is referring to in these verses, we have to notice that Jesus makes a point of telling us the house is empty. Once the evil has gone the man does nothing to fill his life with good things. In the same way, if we try to reform our lives by just getting rid of the evil, but we don't replace the evil with Jesus we will always go back to our old sinful ways.

For some, what Jesus says in verses 46 – 49, sounds very harsh. Jesus' mother and brothers come to see Jesus, but Jesus says that those who are his disciples are his real mother and brothers. How

would you feel if you were Jesus' mother or brother and you heard him say that? But Jesus wasn't discounting the importance of earthly families, he was simply making a point that eternal spiritual relationships were much more important, and even his own mother and brothers would need Jesus to be their savior or they would not be part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Saturday, November 12 – Matthew 13: 1 – 30

This section of Matthew's Gospel begins another extended period of teaching by Jesus through parables. The two parables we are looking at in today's reading both come from the world Jesus lived in, the world of agriculture. In the first parable, often referred to as the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about a farmer who goes out to scatter his seed in the field. In this parable, the farmer is God (or, if you prefer, Jesus or the Holy Spirit). The seed is the Gospel (the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven), and the soil type is the condition of the hearts that are to receive the seed. As the farmer scatters his seed, some of it falls on the hard packed down path, and before it can sprout it is eaten by the birds. As Jesus tells us in verse 19, this hard packed down soil represents those who hear the Gospel but don't take the time to understand what it means for their lives. The next soil Jesus talks about is soil that is filled with rocks and is very shallow. In verses 20 – 21, Jesus teaches that the rocky soil represents those who have shallow hearts. They receive the Gospel with joy, but they never think about it deeply enough so that it can take root and grow in their lives. The third soil type is soil that is filled with weeds. In this soil, the seed springs up but the weeds eventually choke it out. Jesus tells us in verse 22 that this soil type represents those who hear the Gospel but they are so consumed with this life that it is choked out before it can produce fruit. Finally, Jesus tells us about good soil that produces a crop. These are the people who hear the Gospel, apply its truth to their lives and their lives are changed, so that real spiritual fruit comes from them.

The second parable that Jesus tells is also about a farmer planting seeds, but while he sleeps his enemy comes in and scatters weed seeds among the good seeds. When the weeds come up, his servants want to go and pull them out, but the farmer tells them to wait until harvest to separate the weeds from the good plants. The farmer's fear is that if his servants go out into the fields and start pulling weeds they may damage the good plants as well. Sometimes it is hard for us to tell who is a good plant and who is a weed, so it is important that we not judge, but wait and allow Jesus to come, who knows the heart of everyone, and allow him to determine who is appointed to eternal life

and who is appointed to eternal damnation. We must never write people off!

Sunday, November 13 – Matthew 13: 31 – 52

In today's reading there are five short parables that Jesus uses to describe the Kingdom of Heaven. In the first two parables (verses 31 – 33), Jesus uses two illustrations of small things that become huge things that takeover and take complete control of their surroundings. In the first parable, Jesus uses a very small mustard seed that once it is planted grows so big that it takes over the garden. Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is like that mustard seed. Even though, at the start it seems small and insignificant, it will continue to grow and one day dominate the world. In the second parable, Jesus uses yeast working through a batch of dough to make exactly the same point—just as yeast grows and fills the whole loaf of dough, so will the Kingdom of Heaven grow.

Next, in verses 34 – 43, Jesus explains to his disciples the parable of the weeds that we looked at yesterday. Notice that the reason Jesus speaks in parables comes as fulfillment of a prophecy found in Psalm 78:2. Jesus uses parables to help make his point, but he often needed to explain the meaning of the parable to his own disciples.

The next two parables are found in verses 44 – 46, and they deal with the value of the Kingdom of Heaven. In both of these parables the men find something of worth that is so great that it causes them to sell all that they have so that they can acquire the treasure they have found. Jesus' point is very clear. The Kingdom of Heaven is of such infinite worth that we are fools if we do not give up everything else in our lives so that we can possess it.

In the fourth parable of this section, Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is like a great net that is let down from a boat to catch fish. As would happen with a net, there are many things that are caught in the net. Some are keepers, and some a not. Jesus is saying that when the final judgment comes, only the good fish (those who trust Christ as their savior) will be kept by the angels, the bad fish (those who have not trusted Christ as their savior) will be thrown into the fire and destroyed.