

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading
October 31 to November 6

Monday, October 31 – Matthew 6: 1 – 18

In these verses, Jesus continues his explanation of what true righteousness looks like. In the verses we looked at yesterday, the emphasis was more on things that should not be part of our lives. Today the emphasis is on things that ought to mark our lives. But these external acts of righteousness must spring from a right motive in our hearts. In verses 1-4, Jesus deals with the subject of giving to the poor, and Jesus' point isn't just that we should give to the poor, it is that we do it with as little fanfare as possible. Next, in verses 5-15, Jesus deals with the subject of prayer. Along with the very famous Lord's Prayer, which Jesus gave us as template for prayer, Jesus says some very important things about the way we pray in verses 5-8 and 14-15. When we pray it should not be for a show, but as a way of communicating what is in our heart to the Father. There is nothing wrong with public prayer as long as it is done with the right motives of the heart. Part of having the right motives of the heart is to understand the forgiveness that has to been shown to us and having a forgiving spirit to those who have wronged us.

Next, Jesus deals with the subject of fasting. Fasting is not something we do very, but it is a good way to help us to focus in on our spiritual hunger and reprioritize what is important in our lives. But if we do not fast with right motives, then it becomes a waste of time.

Tuesday, November 01 – Matthew 6: 19 – 34

In these verses, Jesus deals with how we view our finances and possessions. Jesus starts with a warning concerning how we are to view our worldly goods in verses 19-24, and Jesus' words couldn't be any clearer. Jesus tells us that we must decide what we are going to live for—this life, or eternal life—God or ourselves. In this warning Jesus points out the foolishness of living just for this life because everything from this life is going to one day vanish and disappear (verse 19). Jesus exhorts us instead to live lives that please God, by serving God and in so doing lay up treasures in heaven (verses 20-21). In verses 21 and 24, Jesus warns us of the folly of trying to serve two masters: money and the true master, God.

In verses 25 – 34, tells us that if we will serve God with all our hearts God will provide for all of our needs just as he provides for the needs of everything else in creation.

Wednesday, November 02 – Matthew 7: 1 – 29

Jesus continues his discourse on how we are to live our lives by explaining how foolish it is for us to be judging others, especially when we haven't dealt with our own messes first. Normally, we are critical and we judge others as a way of covering up our own imperfections. Jesus tells us that, rather than judging others, we should ask God to give us what we lack, and know that because God is good he will give us what we need (verses 7-12). By doing this we can be built into what God desires for us to be rather than tearing others down, so that we can feel better about ourselves. Jesus goes on, in verses 13 and 14, to point out just how hard this is to do. It is the narrow way through the narrow gate; it is not the road that most people take. Ultimately though, we will each be judged by God and by the world based on how we live our lives. We can talk a good talk, but the proof that we belong to Christ is found in how we order the affairs of our lives, so that we produce fruit that will last into eternity. Just talking a good talk without producing any fruit puts our eternal lives in jeopardy (verses 15-23). The way we produce fruit and walk through the narrow way is by listening to all the things Jesus taught and putting his teachings into practice in our lives.

Thursday, November 03 – Matthew 8: 1 – 22

Chapter 8 starts with Matthew's account of Jesus healing a man with leprosy. As you read this account, stop and think about how Jesus interacted with this man. Yes, it is a miracle that Jesus healed him, but also notice that Jesus allowed a man with leprosy to come near him. Lepers were outcasts because their disease was so contagious and so deadly, but rather than shooing the man away Jesus reaches out his hand and touches him healing him of his leprosy. Next, in verses 5-13, Jesus deals with another man whom the Jews would have considered to be unclean. This man doesn't have an incurable disease; he is a Roman soldier, a commander of 100. This Roman soldier knows what real power and authority is (verse 9), so when Jesus offers to go with the soldier to his home (which would have made Jesus unclean under Jewish law) the soldier tells Jesus there is no need for him to do that. His faith in Jesus is so great that he knows that Jesus can just say the word and his servant will be healed. Jesus' statement, in response to this man's faith, indicates that, while many Jews were missing the boat concerning Jesus, and would therefore miss the Kingdom of Heaven, others from around the world would receive by faith what Jesus came to offer, and join Jesus at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. As Jesus continues to heal many other people, Matthew makes a point in verse 17 that this work of healing was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 53:4).

Because of Jesus' powerful teaching and powerful deeds there were many that wanted to follow him, much like people in our world like to hang around with celebrities. But Jesus didn't want people to follow him just because he was popular, so in verses 18-22, Jesus tells them to count the cost. Just how serious Jesus was about this is found in Jesus' response to the man who wanted to follow Jesus after he had buried his father. Jesus' response sounds cruel, but we have to understand what this man really wanted to do. The man's father was not dead; we know this because they buried people right away in those days. What the man wanted was to wait until his father had died, so he could receive his inheritance, before he would begin to follow Jesus. It might be years before this would take place. Jesus' point is that, if we really want to follow him, we must be willing to drop everything and give up everything for the sake of his kingdom.

Friday, November 04 – Matthew 8: 23 – 34

In today's reading, Jesus does two miracles that leave people wondering "what kind of man is this?" The disciples are the first group to ask this question, and it comes after Jesus calms a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. This storm scared the disciples, who were experienced men of the sea, to death. But the amazing thing is Jesus slept right through the storm. Jesus was exhausted from all the work of ministry, but even out on the lake he found no rest. In the midst of the storm Jesus is awoken by his disciples who beg him to do something to help them. What they probably had in mind was for Jesus to help them bail water out of the boat, but Jesus does something much better—he calms the storm. In spite of all the things the disciples have seen Jesus do, they are amazed at his command over the winds and the seas.

After the boat lands on the other side of the lake, Jesus is met by two demon possessed men. The effects of this possession were so severe that these men had to live in the tombs. Notice that the demons immediately recognize who Jesus is and are concerned about what Jesus is going to do with them. In fact, their question to Jesus is very interesting, "Are you going to torture us before the appointed time?" Notice the demons know the time is coming when they will pay for their rebellion against the Kingdom of God. The demons plead with Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs which Jesus does and the pigs rush off a cliff to their death. Jesus' actions so upset the townspeople that they plead with Jesus to leave. Rather than welcoming Jesus' power in their lives they are so frightened by it that they plead with Jesus to leave.

Saturday, November 05 – Matthew 9: 1 – 17

In today's reading Jesus faces criticism from the Pharisees for three different things that he does. Chapter 9 opens with Jesus healing a man who is paralyzed. Rather than telling the man to get up and walk,

Jesus tells the man his sins are forgiven. The Pharisees question Jesus' authority to forgive sins, but Jesus proves the authority by telling the man to get up and walk. As the man walks away there is little doubt that Jesus not only has the power to heal physical infirmities, he also has the ability to heal spiritual infirmities.

Next, Jesus is criticized for calling Matthew, a tax collector, to be one of his disciples. The Jews considered tax collectors to be unclean and sinners. Notice Jesus doesn't just call Matthew to follow him, he also goes to a party at Matthew's house with all of Matthew's "sinner" friends. This opens Jesus to the charge of being a friend to sinners, to which Jesus responds by saying he didn't come to help people who were spiritually healthy, he came to help those who were spiritually sick.

The third criticism that Jesus faced was a result of the party at Matthew's house. The Pharisees ask Jesus why his disciples are partying and having a good time, while John the Baptist's are fasting. Jesus' reply is that he has come and brought something new and it was time to celebrate, but then time would come when Jesus would be gone and then the disciples will mourn and fast.

Sunday, November 06 – Matthew 9: 18 – 38

Through the rest of chapter 9 Jesus continues to heal many people. In fact, while Jesus is on his way to heal the daughter of a ruler, a woman reaches out her hand to touch Jesus as he walks by her and she is immediately healed from a condition that has plagued her for 12 years. By the time Jesus gets to the ruler's house, the ruler's daughter has died. But that does not deter Jesus, rather than healing her, he raises her from the dead. As Jesus goes on two blind men find him and ask him to heal them. As Jesus heals them he tells them not to tell anyone what he has done for them, but they are so overjoyed they cannot contain themselves and they tell everyone how Jesus has given them back their sight. The reason Jesus told them to not tell anyone what he had done for them was to keep the crowds from growing too large around him. But more and more people find Jesus and come to seek his help. One of the people who came to Jesus for help is a man who cannot talk because he has an evil spirit. As Jesus drives the demon out and the man is able to speak again the crowds are amazed, because they have never seen anything or anyone like Jesus. The crowds continue to grow around Jesus and more and more people come out to seek help from Jesus, and as Jesus looks out on the crowds he feels compassion for them because they are harassed and helpless. Notice Jesus' prayer in verse 37, "Ask the Lord to send workers into the harvest field." Do you see the needs all around you? Are you asking God to send more workers? Are you willing to be a worker?