

**Reading Together**  
**New Testament Bible Reading**  
**November 28 to December 4**

**Monday, November 28 – Matthew 22: 1 – 14**

In today's reading, Jesus tells another parable that illustrates how Israel will reject him and the Gentiles will accept him. There are two significant points in this parable. The first deals with Israel's rejection of Jesus. In this parable, God is the king who prepares the wedding banquet to honor his son (Jesus). The invited guests are the religious leaders of Israel. They not only refuse to come to the banquet, but they also kill the messengers (the prophets) who come with the invitation. As terrible as this sounds, it is exactly what Israel did to the prophets. Notice the king's response to their blatant insult—he burns their city (verse 7). In 70 AD, thirty five years after Jesus was crucified, God allowed the Romans to come into Jerusalem and burn it to the ground.

In response to the refusal of the invited guests to come, the king sends servants out into the countryside to invite the common people, both good and bad, to come. They, of course, are excited to come and they will fill the wedding hall. In those days the host of a wedding party would provide the appropriate attire for the guests to wear, and in this parable Jesus includes the details of one guest who apparently refuses to wear the clothing that is provided to them. This also is an insult to the king and his graciousness. And this is the second significant point in this parable. Those who refuse to clothe themselves in the righteousness of Christ will not be allowed to enjoy the heavenly wedding banquet. While the Gospel invitation is freely offered to all, and there is an open invitation to come, a person cannot come however they choose to come.

**Tuesday, November 30 – Matthew 22: 15 – 46**

In today's reading, different groups of Jewish leaders try to entrap Jesus and get him to say something which will either discredit him in the eyes of the people or allow them to arrest him, but in each case Jesus answers them so wisely that there is nothing they can do to him. The first question Jesus is asked is brought to him by a group from the Pharisees, who hated Rome, and Herodians, who were puppets of

Caesar. Notice how they try to butter him up with insincere flattery in verses 15-16. Their question is whether it is right for Jews to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus responds by asking them whose picture is on the coin they use. When they respond that it is Caesar's, Jesus tells them then it belongs to Caesar and they should give to Caesar what is his and to God to what belongs to him. His point is that since we are made in the image of God, we belong to Him completely.

The second question Jesus is asked is brought to him by the Sadducees. It is a question about Jewish law and the resurrection, which is really interesting, because the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Under the Mosaic Law, if a husband died childless, the oldest brother had a legal obligation to marry his widow and help her to bear children who would carry on the deceased brother's family line. In the question the Sadducees ask, there are seven brothers all of whom die and leave the widow childless. Their question is which brother will the widow be married to in the resurrection. They are hoping that in answering this question Jesus will either discredit the Law of Moses or the resurrection. Even though the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, the Pharisees did, so their thinking is that, one way or another, Jesus' answer, is going to cause a disturbance, which will lead to his arrest or would discredit him. But again Jesus answers wisely in verses 29-32, by first telling them that there is no marriage in the resurrection, but there is indeed a resurrection because God is the God of the living not the dead.

Finally, they ask Jesus what the greatest commandment is. Again, this is a question designed to trap Jesus, but, once again, Jesus answers wisely by summarizing all the law as love the Lord your God with all of heart, and mind and then love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus points out that everything else hangs on these two commandments. You might call them 1a and 1b.

Now it is Jesus' turn to ask a question and he asks them whose son will the Messiah (The Christ) be? They reply that he will be David's son, which is based on God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 that someone from David's family would rule over God's people forever. But Jesus points out to them that while the Messiah will be from David's family line, he will be greater than David. Greater to the point that David refers to him as Lord in Psalm 110:1 (verse 44).

### **Wednesday, December 01 – Matthew 23: 1 – 39**

This passage marks the end of Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees. There is nothing more to say to them to try to sway them from their unbelief, so the time has come for Jesus to pronounce judgment on them. Jesus' pronouncement of judgment encompasses chapters 23, 24, and 25. In chapter 23, Jesus points out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and pronounces seven woes (curses) upon them. Jesus begins by telling the crowd that they must obey the Pharisees because they are in authority, but they should not act like them (verses 2-10), because everything they do is done just for men to see. They make an outward adornment of themselves (phylacteries were boxes that contained Old Testament passages that were worn on either the forehead or the arm) and put on a good show, they love to be honored, but they only care about themselves.

The seven woes that Jesus pronounces on them all have to do with their hypocrisy. They show every effort at being religious but their hearts are far from God. On the outside, in men's eyes, they are clean, but on the inside, where God sees, they are foul and utterly corrupt. They try to shut people out of the Kingdom of Heaven (verse 14), they work to win converts only to turn them into bigger pagans than they are (verse 15), they take meaningless oaths that they fill with loopholes (verses 16-22), they tithe scrupulously but show no mercy to others (verses 23-24), they give an outward appearance of righteousness, but their hearts are filthy (verses 25 -28). They act like they are better than their forefathers, but they are just as guilty (verses 29-36).

Jesus warns them in verses 35-39 that all of the judgment due to them is about to come down on them, and knowing this makes Jesus feel pity for them.

### **Thursday, December 02 – Matthew 24: 1 – 35**

In these verses Jesus continues with the theme of judgment, both for Israel in his day and in the future on the last day. Chapter 24 seems to alternate between events during the lifetime of those who were hearing Jesus speak and the time right before his second coming. In verse 2, Jesus tells those he is speaking to that every stone of the temple would be thrown down. This happened in 70 AD when the Romans came into Jerusalem and completely destroyed the city. In verses 4-8, Jesus says

some things could happen in every age: wars, famines, earthquakes, etc. but his analogy of birth pains make it seem like these will happen with greater and greater intensity and frequency the closer the day comes for his return. Jesus then warns that persecution will break against those who are his followers and that persecution will cause many to abandon the cause of Christ (verses 9-13). There was widespread persecution of the early church and many did leave the faith, but the gospel continued to go out to the ends of the earth (verse 14). But still, not every person has heard the Gospel. There are still unreached peoples. Jesus says, in verse 14, that the end will not come until every tribe and every tongue has heard the Gospel.

The abomination that causes desolation is a reference from the book of Daniel that refers to the temple being desecrated. This happened before Jesus was born, when the Greeks slaughtered a pig (an unclean animal) in the temple; however, in these verses, Jesus seems to be referring to a future event. It could either refer to the Romans destroying the Temple in AD 70 or to a future event when the temple will be rebuilt and the image of the anti-Christ is set up in it. We just don't know. The important things to take from this passage are that Jesus is returning and there will be a final judgment. We don't know when, but we must be ready.

### **Friday, December 03 – Matthew 24: 36 – 25: 13**

These verses are a continuation of yesterday's reading. In verses 36-44, Jesus emphasizes what is most important. It is not trying to figure out the day or the hour (even the Son does not know this [verse 36]). It is being prepared for that day. In verses 37-39, Jesus compares the time before Noah's flood with the time before his coming. Only those who were prepared were saved, and so it will be when Jesus comes again. In verses 42-51 Jesus tells two parables. The first is about the owner of the house, who, if he knew he was going to be robbed, would keep watch and be ready for the robbers, but of course it is not possible to know such a thing so Jesus' message is to always be ready. The second deals with a master and his servants and how important it is for the servants to always be prepared and ready for their master to come home again. In the same way, as servants of Jesus Christ, we must be ready and prepared for his return. That is what the parable of the ten virgins (bridesmaids) is about in Matthew 25. Five were unprepared and

were left out of the feast, five were prepared and they were able to join the feast. Notice the central point in verse 13 to always be ready.

### **Saturday, December 04 – Matthew 25: 14 – 46**

Yesterday's reading focused on the importance of being prepared for Jesus' return, and in today's reading, Jesus tells us what it means to be prepared through two parables that are connected together. The first parable is the familiar parable of the talents in which the master (who represents Jesus) goes away on a long journey, which represents the time between Jesus' first and second coming. While he is away the master entrusts different amounts of money to three of his servants. Notice in verse 15, that the amount entrusted to each servant is based on their abilities. They are to invest the money, so that the master's wealth grows while he is away. Two of the servants double the money that was entrusted to them, and they are well rewarded when the master returns. But the third takes what was given to him and buries it in the ground. When the master returns and asks the servant why he was so lazy the servant blames the master for being a hard master to please. But that is not really the case, is it? Because this servant did nothing with what was entrusted to him, the master takes away what he was given and throws him out into the darkness. The point of this parable is that as Christians we have been entrusted with much, if nothing else we have the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but we also have been given other gifts and talents with which to build the Kingdom. If we are selfish and keep those things for ourselves, we should expect no rewards from Jesus, only his condemnation.

The second parable goes hand in hand with that parable and is found in verses 31 – 46. In some ways it is not really a parable at all. Jesus tells his listeners that when he returns the angels, that accompany him, will separate people into two groups, the sheep and the goats. The sheep will be given their inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, and the goats will be cast out into hell. Notice that the basis for the judgment is what we have done with what has been entrusted to us. Did we show mercy and care for those in need, or did we ignore them? Jesus says whatever we do for the least of his brothers, it is as if we have done it for him. Our failure to act and show mercy shows that we really don't understand the mercy we have been shown by Jesus. Our lack of action condemns us because it shows that Jesus really isn't Lord of our

lives; because we do not love others who belong to him, we really don't love him either.

### **Sunday, December 05 – Matthew 26: 1 – 35**

Today's reading chronicles the events that lead up to Jesus' crucifixion. These events begin with a plot by the Jewish leaders to arrest Jesus and kill him, but they have to figure out a way to do it on the sly, because the crowds love Jesus. While they are plotting to kill him, others are showing love to Jesus. In verses 6 – 13, a woman anoints Jesus with a jar of very expensive perfume. In that time, and in that culture, this perfume may very well have represented her retirement investment, but she took it and anointed Jesus with it. This scandalized some of the disciples who argue that money from the sale of the perfume could have been put to better use, but Jesus rebukes and tells them they will always have the poor to show love to, but they will only have him for a few more hours. What this woman did actually prepared Jesus for his burial, because as we read the accounts in the rest of Matthew's Gospel, we will see that there was not time to properly prepare Jesus' body because of the Sabbath. Many believe that Judas' anger over this event was the straw that broke the camel's back and caused Judas to go and betray Jesus (verses 14-16). The remainder of today's reading covers Jesus celebrating the first Lord's Supper with his disciples and Jesus' prediction that Judas would betray him and Peter would deny him. Notice in verses 27 and 28, that Jesus encourages us to continue to observe the Lord's Supper until he returns.