

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading
October 24 to 30

Monday, October 24 – Titus 3: 1 – 15

Paul begins this last section of his letter to Titus with practical instructions concerning how Christians are to live in the world. They are to be obedient and subject to rulers and authorities that God places over them (unless those rulers and authorities overstep their bounds and command them to do something which goes against God's rule and authority). They are to do what is good and live with peace and humility toward all men.

Next, Paul explains why we are to live this way, and, simply put, it is because of what Christ has done for us. We too at one time were just as foolish in the way we lived as the world is (verse 3), but Jesus rescued us from our own foolishness and gave us new hope for an eternal inheritance with him (verses 3-7). In verse 8, Paul makes it clear that what Jesus has done for us is the reason we are to devote ourselves to doing good. This is such an important point that we so often miss. We don't do good to earn favor with God; we do good because of the favor God has already shown us in Christ. That is the theological basis for us doing good. The practical reason for us to do good is found in verse 14—so that we can live productive lives and provide for our daily necessities.

In verses 9-11, Paul gives Titus one last piece of advice that we would do well to put into practice in our own lives and in our own churches. In short, what Paul tells Titus can be summarized like this: Don't waste time in foolish arguments that aren't important, and don't waste time with people who like to engage in arguments that only cause division.

Tuesday, October 25 – Matthew 1: 1 – 25

Matthew's Gospel account was written primarily to a Jewish audience, an audience that had been waiting and looking for the long promised Messiah to come. Matthew's point in writing this gospel account is that the Messiah has indeed come, and that Messiah is Jesus. To make his case, Matthew takes great pains throughout his gospel to point how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. That explains why Matthew begins his gospel account with a genealogy of Jesus that starts with Abraham and runs through David to Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is no coincidence that Jesus' genealogy runs through Abraham and David. In Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that He would make Abraham into a great nation and all people on the earth would be blessed through Abraham's offspring. And in 2 Samuel 7, God promised David that his throne would be established forever. The Messiah the Jews were longing for would be the one that these promises would be fulfilled through. Jesus is that Messiah. I will grant you that genealogies are not always the most interesting things to read; however, as you scan these verses you will see names that are very familiar for those who are somewhat acquainted with the Old Testament, names like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,

Judah, Boaz, David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Zerubbabel. But there is also something very interesting tucked away in this genealogy, the names of four very prominent Old Testament women. It is most unusual for women to be included in any ancient genealogy, but Matthew makes sure to include the names of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Tamar was a widow who was mistreated by her father-in-law Jacob (Genesis 38), Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who lived in Jericho before the walls came tumbling down (Joshua 2), Ruth was an outsider from Moab (Ruth 1-4), and Bathsheba committed adultery with King David (2 Samuel 11). Don't you find it amazing that Jesus' family tree runs through women who struggled in life, but in the end were used by God to accomplish his purpose?

Mary was a woman just like that, and as you read the account of Jesus' birth, in verses 18-25, it would seem that Mary had been unfaithful to her fiancé, Joseph. But Matthew goes to great trouble to point out that Mary had not been unfaithful, Jesus was not an illegitimate child, but a child who was the fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 7:14), who would be Immanuel (God with us) and save the people from their sins.

Wednesday, October 26 – Matthew 2: 1 – 23

As Matthew seeks to stress the Kingship of Jesus he recounts the story of the Magi (Wise Men) who come to visit Jesus at his birth. These men probably came close to two years after Jesus was born, which is evidenced by the fact that Herod had all of the babies in Bethlehem and its vicinity to be killed when the Magi did not come back to tell him where to find Jesus (verses 16-18). The reason Herod wanted Jesus dead is found in verse 2. The Magi were looking for the one who was to be born the King of the Jews, which meant that Jesus was a threat to Herod's rule and reign.

In this chapter we see Matthew point to Old Testament prophecy to make the point that Jesus is the Messiah. In verse 6, Matthew references Micah 5:2 concerning how the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. In verse 15, Matthew ties Jesus' parents taking Jesus to safety in Egypt to the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, that God would call his son out of Egypt. In verses 17 and 18, Matthew ties in the words of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:15) to the suffering that occurs as a result of Herod's edict that all of the babies born in Bethlehem should be put to death. In verse 23, Matthew makes what seems to be another reference to Old Testament prophecy with the words, "He shall be called a Nazarene," but on the surface it does not appear there is an Old Testament prophecy which corresponds to this quote. However, there are many Old Testament prophecies which talk of the Messiah being despised and rejected (for example Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53:3), and everyone who came from the region around Nazareth was indeed looked down on (John 1:46).

Thursday, October 27 – Matthew 3: 1 – 17

In Matthew 3, Matthew shows how John the Baptist prepared both Jesus' audience and Jesus for Jesus' ministry. John the Baptist prepared Jesus' audience by showing them their need to repent of their sins and their need for a savior to save them

from their sins, and again there is a reference to Old Testament prophecy contained in these verses. In verse 3, Matthew's description of the John the Baptist's ministry comes directly from Isaiah 40:3.

John the Baptist also prepared Jesus for his ministry by baptizing Jesus. The question is often asked if baptism was for repentance and Jesus never sinned, then why did Jesus need to be baptized? The reason why is this. Jesus came to save us from our sins, so, in order to do that, he had to become one of us and identify with us. Just as our baptism shows our union with Christ, his baptism shows his union with us. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Friday, October 28 – Matthew 4: 1 – 25

After Jesus was baptized, he was led by the Holy Spirit out into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted by Satan. Before this temptation came, Jesus prepared himself by fasting for 40 days and forty nights. One may wonder why did Jesus fast when the first thing Satan used to tempt Jesus was his hunger. But fasting prepared Jesus for this test by helping Jesus to focus and feed on his relationship with his Father. We don't avoid temptation by being comfortable because we have physical resources, we escape temptation by having spiritual resources which allow us to repel Satan's attacks (***Ephesians 6:12-13** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* ¹³ *Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*).

Satan tempted Jesus in three different ways. First, in verse 3, Satan tempted Jesus to meet his physical needs by using his power to please himself—turning stones into bread. Next, in verse 3, Satan tempts Jesus to put on a big show by throwing himself from the roof of the temple (the highest point in the city), and have the angels swoop in and save him. Finally, Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain and offered him all of the kingdoms of the world (those kingdoms were Satan's to offer because they were kingdoms that stood opposed to the rule of God.) Notice that Jesus answered each of these temptations by quoting Scripture (The Old Testament). In others words, through fasting and knowing God's Word Jesus was ready to face whatever temptations Satan threw his way. If we want to resist temptation we must follow that same model of (1) focusing on spiritual things rather than physical comforts and (2) knowing what God's Word says, after all it is the sword of the spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

Saturday, October 29 – Matthew 5: 1 – 16

These verses are the beginning of one of Jesus' extended periods of teaching that are included in Matthew's Gospel. This particular teaching is known as the Sermon on the Mount and it goes through all of chapters 5, 6, and 7. Jesus starts this extended teaching with what we know today as The Beatitudes, which are a series of short, to the point, teachings on how opposite the heavenly path to happiness is

from the worldly path to happiness—in Biblical terms to be blessed means to find true happiness. Take a moment and look at each of these verses and think how different the path Jesus says for us to take to true happiness is from the normal path that most of us travel to seek happiness. To be poor in spirit means that we recognize our spiritual poverty and we mourn over it (verse 4). This in turn makes us humble (verse 5) and causes us to hunger and thirst for real righteousness (verse 6), that hunger and thirst will lead us to be merciful (verse 7), as we see the mercy that has been shown to us, and to be pure in heart as we seek righteousness that comes only from God (verse 8). Finally rather than stirring up trouble trying to get our own way, we will seek peace (verse 9), but often we will find persecution because of our faith in Christ. This is not the world's path to happiness—the world's path is exactly the opposite—feel good about yourself, find yourself, get for yourself. But in verse 12 Jesus explains why his path is the path to true happiness, because his path is the only path that leads to eternal rewards.

In the very familiar verses that follow (verses 13-16), Jesus reminds his followers how different they are to be from the world around them, so different they stand out for all to see.

Sunday, October 30 – Matthew 5: 17 – 48

As Jesus continues his sermon he explains what the law is really all about. The law is not about external behavior, it is about our hearts and what is going on inside of them. It is not enough to just not kill someone; we also must not harbor ill will toward others in our hearts (verses 16-22). It is not enough to just worship God if we have relationships with others that we have broken and we do not seek to make right. We cannot be reconciled to God if we are not reconciled to our brothers (verses 23-26). It is not enough to just have outward sexual purity, we also need inward purity in our thoughts as well (verses 27-30). Jesus goes on to tell us that if we break the covenant of marriage for any reason other than marital unfaithfulness we are committing adultery (verses 31-32). We should be people of such integrity that our simple yes or no should be enough for anyone to accept without having to take oaths to prove we are telling the truth (verses 33-37). Finally rather than living by the old code of an eye for an eye, we should be people of mercy, who love even our enemies (verses 38-47). Jesus sums all of this up for us in verse 48 with the words, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." That's a tall order; in fact, it is an impossible order for us. Therefore none of us can be truly righteous. That's why we need Jesus. Jesus is the only one who fulfilled all the requirements of the law perfectly (verses 17-20). He did what we can never do for ourselves. That is why he is our perfect sacrifice, and our righteousness.