

Sunday, October 21, 2018—Matthew 23-25

Parents, coaches, government leaders, and others in authority walk a precarious walk as they teach those under them how to live. They often say one thing and do another. They often lose all credibility as a result.

Jesus warned His disciples on numerous occasions about the Pharisees. In Matthew 23, He said plainly, “Do what they tell you because it’s right, but don’t do what they do because it’s sinful.” He then pronounced woes over the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy.

While He was righteously angry with the religious leaders, He was tender and patient with His disciples. Others had asked Jesus for a sign, mostly to prove His legitimacy, and Jesus rebuffed them. When His disciples asked for a sign, however, He obliged them. They weren’t asking about His legitimacy but were genuinely wanting to know what He was doing and how He was going to bring about what He had promised.

What Jesus foresaw and described was not pleasant. There were coming days of destruction and misery, but He said they would be cut short for the sake of the elect (24:22). Those days would require endurance, but the gospel would find its way to all the nations in the process (24:14).

Jesus said only God the Father knew when this would occur (24:36), so He told parables about their being ready and faithful (25:1-30). God is preparing for the day when He will separate the righteous from the unrighteous, and Jesus lived the perfect example. Pray today to follow in His steps of faithfulness, obedience, and endurance.

Saturday, October 20, 2018—Matthew 20-22

Jesus was teaching in ways the people had never heard, and He was describing a Kingdom they had never imagined. Rather than coming to displace the romans and reestablish an earthly kingdom, He was bringing God rules into the souls of man. To explain this and to establish the requirements God had for those who entered His Kingdom, Jesus told many parables beginning with, “The Kingdom of heaven is like . . .”

In the Kingdom, the last will be first, and the first will be last. God grants access and gives rewards based on His plans and righteousness. He can do what He wants, and He remains just and loving. Jesus remains patient and sacrificial despite the selfishness and ignorance of disciples.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem for the final week of His ministry, God demonstrated His wisdom, power, and control amidst the chaos. Jesus directed the disciples to go find a donkey, and they found it just as He described. Jesus rode into town just as prophets had predicted. The people praised Him just as Scripture foretold. This sovereignty is important to note as Jesus then went into the Temple and turned over tables. What was happening there was not what God intended in His Kingdom.

God intends to expand His Kingdom through those who produce its fruit (21:43).

He invites those who see Him as worthy of their time, talent, and treasure. He chooses those who will serve obediently and humbly (22:1-14). Thank Him for your invitation into the Kingdom.

Friday, October 19, 2018—Matthew 16-19

Good leaders have tough conversations. Because of His love for the disciples, He forced them to think critically about the truth. This required examining their views of tradition and religious practice.

The Pharisees were the religious elite. Jesus, however, told the disciples to beware. Their teaching and perspective were flawed, and, like yeast, would have an impact on a far larger entity. Jesus then asked the disciples who they believed He Himself was. They quoted what others thought, but Peter confessed He was the Christ, and Jesus said on this kind of personal, authentic faith He would build His church.

Despite his confession, Peter remained unrefined in belief. When Jesus said He had to suffer as others had suffered, Peter questioned Him. In turn, Jesus rebuked Peter. This immaturity did not disqualify Peter, and, in fact, Jesus allowed Peter, along with James and John, to see Him transfigured and exalted above even Moses and Elijah. Jesus then called them to greatness through living faith as small as a mustard seed (17:20-21).

Greatness and influence in the Kingdom comes from child-like faith (18:3). Greatness also involves discipline, reconciliation, and forgiveness (18:15-22). God has a design for marriage and a place for even the eunuch and the child, but He will cause sadness in those whose possessions are more precious than He (19:22). Jesus promises to do the impossible (19:26) and says the first will be last and the last, first (19:30).

Thank God for the truth. Live for the glory of Jesus alone.

Thursday, October 18, 2018—Matthew 12-15

“Are you for me or against me?” The question has clarified friendships and allegiances throughout all generations. As Jesus taught, He defined the Kingdom and how one lived in line with its standards.

He often taught in parables in order to identify those who were longing for the Kingdom. Those with a passing interest would hear the stories and move on, but those who were convicted would come back for illustrations and ask question about following

Him. The Kingdom requires personal sacrifice and loyal obedience.

Through His teaching, ministry, and proclamation, Jesus gained a favorable reputation with the hurting and needy, but He quickly ruffled the feathers of the religious leadership of Israel. They asked Him, “Why do your disciples break the traditions of the elders?” (15:2a), and He responded, “Why do you break God’s commands with your tradition?” (15:3). He was making clear that they were on two different sides of the Kingdom, having two different interpretations of righteousness.

Being aligned with Him did not guarantee ease. John the Baptist found himself in prison because of calling out King Herod for his sin, and John lost his life because of his preaching. Paul told early believers that they must go through many trials to enter the Kingdom (see Acts 14:22). Hard conversations and tough cultural stands are part of the calling.

In two different settings, Jesus multiplied food for those coming to Him. Pray for increasing trust to endure whatever you face as you walk with Him. Pray for increasing boldness to proclaim the truth of the Kingdom.

Wednesday, October 17, 2018—Matthew 8-11

Matthew wrote for Jews to see Jesus as Messiah and quoted the Old Testament to show Jesus’ fulfillment of all God had promised. In Matthew 8, the former tax collector turns the attention from Jesus’ teaching to His healing ministry. As His teaching fulfilled Scripture, so did His healing. “He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases” (8:17b).

His power extended beyond physical sickness. When He was with the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, He calmed the winds (8:26), and on the other side of the lake he freed two men from demonic possession. He was not simply a traveling teacher and healer. He was demonstrating supernatural power like no other. When some friends brought a lame friend for healing, Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven” (9:2), causing the religious leaders to accuse Him of blasphemy. His power was coming from God in a way they had never seen before, and they were amazed.

Jesus was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and quoting Old Testament scripture, yet He continued to frustrate the religious leaders because His understanding of what God intended and their understanding of what God expected were continually in conflict. He did not line up with their practices or standards, and they concluded He was a heretic.

Despite their objections, Jesus continued ministering, teaching, and proclaiming

the Kingdom. He felt compassion because the people were like sheep without a shepherd (9:36), so He sent His disciples on a challenging mission to gather sheep and glorify His name (10:1-42).

Take up His yoke (11:28-30), and follow Him on the same mission.

Tuesday, October 16, 2018—Matthew 5-7

Jesus was a teacher. Matthew 5-7 provides a series of truths Jesus delivered to His disciples. “Don’t think I’ve come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill” (5:17). His teaching might have seemed revolutionary or controversial, but His intention was to fulfill everything God intended through the Law.

The overall goal of the Law was for the people of God to walk with Him in holiness. Jesus, therefore, was ministering, teaching, and reaching in order to make the way for holiness. His Sermon on the Mount was a call to holiness, living counter-culturally for the benefit of the culture and the glory of God.

Jesus discussed difficult subjects like adultery, murder, divorce, integrity, revenge, and love (5:18-48) to illustrate the power of Kingdom living in a dying world. He called them to be salt and light, so He showed them what that would look like. He concluded, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). Like the Law from the Father, this command from the Son was impossible to fulfill without the indwelling presence of the Spirit to empower and to guide.

Teaching about prayer, money, and worry, Jesus concluded, “Don’t worry about tomorrow . . . Each day has enough trouble of its own” (6:34). Summarizing the Law and the Prophets, He said, “Whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them” (7:12). He said those who followed Him would be evident from the fruit of their lives (7:20).

Be holy. Don’t worry. Live well.

Monday, October 15, 2018—Matthew 1-4

God made several covenants with man. His covenant with Moses established a code of holiness for His people. Over time, He gave promises about a new covenant, specifically in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, which He would not write on stone, as with Moses, but on the heart, by the Spirit.

The record of this New Covenant begins with Matthew. One of the 12 disciples, he wrote his Gospel for a Jewish audience, hoping they would discover how Jesus was

the Messiah, the Chosen One of God. To provide evidence, Matthew quoted numerous Old Testament passages.

Matthew began his good news account by giving the genealogy of Jesus and showing His lineage through Abraham, the father of the Jews, and King David, the greatest king of the Jews. Also, he discussed the unusual and miraculous events surrounding Jesus' birth and early childhood (1:17-2:23). Here he quoted Scripture for the first time to illustrate how God had been planning for a Messiah and preparing His people.

Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, John the Baptist came with a message of repentance, calling people to change their minds and their actions, in order to live in the kingdom of God (3:2). He spoke harshly against religious leaders and set high expectations (3:8) for those who wanted to be a part of God's mission. Affirming his ministry, Jesus came to John and asked John to baptize him and began to preach the same thing (4:17) after His own time of personal testing.

Pray for faithfulness in following Jesus, the true Messiah.