
The Gospel According to Matthew:

A Reading Guide for Chapters 14-28

Welcome!

Over the next 10 weeks we will be studying the second half of the book of Matthew together.

Many scholars divide Matthew 5-23 into 5 sections of teaching. Each section, or discourse, ends with the phrase “When Jesus had finished these sayings...” Because this pattern is clearly repeated in the text, it is helpful to consider each section as a collection of teachings that communicate a unified message.

Following those textual breaks, here’s how the lessons will be divided:

- Lessons 1-3: The 4th discourse (Matthew 14-19:1)
- Lessons 4-8: The 5th discourse (Matthew 19-25)
- Lessons 9-10: The Passion Week and Great Commission

We’ve included Matthew’s text at the start of each set of lessons so that you can easily reference it and mark it up in order to help you follow the flow of thought.

Each lesson will contain a five sets of questions. Our hope is that this format will help you grow in the habit of spending time reading God’s Word on a daily basis. You might want a selection of colored pencils handy to mark the text.

We have used the ESV in our study and preparation but you are welcome and encourage to reference other versions.

Our desire is that God will use these lessons to help you see the beauty of His preserved Word. The Scripture tells us that God’s Word is his very breath. May the Holy God breathe these words of life afresh into your soul.

Sincerely,

Your servants,

Debi Martin ~ Holly Miller ~ Teren Sechrist

The 4th Discourse - Lessons 1-3

Setting your Mind on the Things of God

As you read, keep in mind that like you, the original readers were not reading these stories as they happened. Jesus' stories had been repeated orally for many years before Matthew penned this gospel. Like most of you, the original readers were fully aware that Jesus Christ had died, had risen from the dead and ascended into glory. They knew that God's promises had been fulfilled. Because of this, they weren't racing through the book just to see how the story ends. Rather, they were able to savor each part of this gospel in the light of the risen, glorified Savior. Remember the risen Christ as you read today.

Throughout the book of Matthew we see two types of people: citizens of earth and citizens of heaven. Jesus is continually pointing the eyes of his disciples toward the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is both a future hope and a present reality.

Jesus shows the disciples that they are a part of the kingdom of heaven now, however they need to set their minds on the things of God in order to see this world rightly. This conflict seems to be the main theme of this fourth discourse. It climaxes in chapter 16 verse 23. Jesus has just told the disciples about his soon coming death and resurrection and Peter rebukes him. Jesus responds with the harshest words that can be spoken to a human -- "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus explains: "For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

As we spend the next three weeks in this text, we will continually be challenged to consider the disciples' struggle to see with the eyes of faith. As we ponder Jesus' loving redirection of their understanding, let us pray that our minds will be set on the things of God.

You might want to begin this section of lessons by reading through the entire discourse and highlighting this key verse (Matthew 16:23).

Matthew 14:1-19:2

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, 2 and he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." 3 For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, 4 because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, 7 so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. 8 Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." 9 And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. 10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, 11 and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. 12 And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." 17 They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." 18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And they all ate and were satisfied. And

they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

28 And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

34 And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick 36 and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

15 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." 3 He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," 6 he need not honor his father.'

So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. 7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

8 “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

10 And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: 11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” 12 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” 13 He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. 14 Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” 15 But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” 16 And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” 24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26 And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” 27 She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” 28 Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

29 Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, 31 so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

32 Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." 33 And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?" 34 And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." 35 And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, 36 he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 37 And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 38 Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

16 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. 4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.

5 When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. 6 Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? 9 Do you not

yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? 10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? 11 How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” 12 Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels

in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

17 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

9 And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” 10 And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” 11 He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. 12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

14 And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, 15 said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. 16 And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.” 17 And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” 20 He

said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

22 As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, 23 and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.

24 When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" 25 He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" 26 And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. 27 However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! 8 And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and

throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a

hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

19 Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

ESV

Read Matthew 14:1-13

Previously in the book of Matthew (chapter 3), we've met John the Baptist and learned that he was the prophet that fulfilled the words of Isaiah and came before Jesus to prepare the way for him. He preached repentance for the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. We learned that he wore the clothes and ate the food of the Old Testament prophets. He knew that his ministry was in preparation for one who would follow, one who was greater than him. (3:11) We also read that John baptized Jesus himself in order to fulfill all righteousness.

Jesus learns that John has been arrested in 4:12. In Chapter 9 John's disciples (students) come to Jesus and ask for clarification on the question of fasting. Why do they fast and Jesus' disciples do not fast? You can read Jesus' answer in 9:14-17. In chapter 11 John sends his disciples back to Jesus to hear from his own lips that his is the one they have been waiting for. Jesus beautifully responds to their questions by recounting the prophecies that he has fulfilled. Jesus goes on to speak to the crowds about who John is and how he has fulfilled the mission he was sent to accomplish.

As you read through the fourth discourse, select a color and highlight all the references to John the Baptist.

- 1) To what did Herod attribute Jesus' mighty works? (14:2)

- 2) On the basis of what "things of earth" had Herod made his decision to kill John?

- 3) What mighty works does Matthew record immediately after he tells us that Jesus hears about Herod's opinion? (14:19, 14:25, 14:32, 14:36)

- 4) What does Herod's connection of miraculous works with resurrection power say about his spiritual mindset? How do these miraculous works help you set your mind on the things of God?

Read Matthew 14:13-21.

Highlight the words of Christ.

- 1) In the midst of the miraculous works Jesus is revealing the hearts of the disciples. Consider the pericope (that's probably a new word -- its pronounced per-ick-uh-pee -- it's super fun to say and it just means a short story within a longer narrative) in verses 13-20. Like any good story there's a conflict. The Greeks labeled this aspect of the story as "suffering". Who is suffering in this section? (Multiple answers are OK)

- 2) How is each party's suffering resolved? How do they respond?

- 3) In the gospels, it is rare that the narrator gives a glimpse into the thought life of the characters. Most of the time we are simply told what happens and we determine their emotions and their feelings by what they say. So, when the narrator does give us a glimpse into the soul, its a big deal. In 14:14 we get such a glimpse into the soul of our Savior. What motivated Jesus?

- 4) How does this story portray the disciples' struggle to set their minds on the things of God? How might you learn from their struggle?

Read Matthew 14:22-36.

Highlight the words of Christ.

- 1) With what repeated action of Christ does this pericope begin? (14:13, 14:23)

- 2) What “things of earth” provide the backdrop for this story?

- 3) Who is suffering? How do the disciples describe that suffering? (Yes, there can be multiple answers here!)

- 4) To what did Jesus attribute the disciples suffering? (Matt. 14:31)

- 5) The disciples respond to Jesus’ rebuke with worship. They turn from their doubt and declare that Jesus is the Son of God. Only a few others have made this profession in the book of Matthew. Consider who they were and in that light, why was this response so significant?

Matthew 4:3

Matthew 4:6

Matthew 8:29

- 6) How did the men of Gennesaret respond when they recognized Jesus? How will you respond?

Read Matthew 15:1-28.

Continue to consider the things-of-earth vs. things-of-God dilemma as you read about the learned scholars and teachers of Israel. They were the “most righteous” and Jesus gives them a new name: He calls them hypocrites, a term that meant a stage-player, an actor. Matthew records the use of this term 15 times -- far more than any other gospel writer. It comes from the lips of Jesus only.

- 1) In this pericope, what do the Pharisees and scribes see as the suffering? (15:2)

- 2) What is the focus of the disciples’ (15:12) Consider this in light of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 11:4-6.

- 3) What does Jesus declare the problem to be? (15:6)

- 4) Consider the depth of spiritual blindness among the Israelites. Jesus uses the words of Scripture to shine the light of truth on the teaching of Israel’s teachers. To whom does he then explain it?
Matthew 15:10

Matthew 15:12

Matthew 15:15

- 5) In literature, a foil is a character or sub-plot used to amplify some aspect of the main character by providing a striking contrast. How does the woman in verses 21-28 provide a foil for the disciples lack of understanding?
 - a) What nationality is she?
 - b) What does she ask for?
 - c) Of whom does she ask?
 - d) How many times does she ask?
 - e) How does she demonstrate that she understands the difference between things-of-earth and things-of-God?

- 6) Jesus names her persistence. What does he call it?

- 7) Whose example ought we follow?

Read Matthew 15:29-39

- 1) As you read, compare this to the occasion recorded in chapter 14:13-21. Record the similarities. (i.e. both have..., both do..., both are...)

- 2) Record the differences.

- 3) What does this account reveal when we consider the things-of-earth vs. things-of-heaven theme? Have the disciples changed?

- 4) This week we have looked at the beginning of the discourse. As you think back over the week's lesson, with which character can you most identify? Why?

- 5) Are there particular instructions of Jesus that have convicted you or opened your eyes to truth? Have these stories helped you to lift your eyes from the things-of-earth to the things-of-God? Be prepared to encourage your fellow travelers with both your victories and to be encouraged by their prayers for your struggles.

Day One

Re-read Matthew 15:32-39 and continue through 16:12.

By way of reminder, the two chapters of Matthew's gospel that we will look at this week form the center of the 4th discourse. Last week we considered the struggle to set our minds on the things of God. This week that tension heightens.

Begin your study by praying for wisdom and understanding.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were two different groups of teachers within Israel. You could liken them to our denominations today. The significant difference between them was that the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection (and that is why they were sad-you-see!). Here they are coming together, "across the aisle." to test Jesus.

This is not the first time Jesus has been explicitly tested in this gospel. Let's review.

- 1) Who tests Jesus in Matthew 4:1? How does Jesus respond in 4:7?

- 2) To make matters worse, they ask for a sign. Matthew's recorded a very similar occasion in chapter 12:38-41. What emphasis are we supposed to perceive because of this repeated teaching from Jesus? How does it set the stage for the lesson that the disciples learn in the next verses?

- 3) In verses 5-12 we've got a conflict in the perceived suffering again. What do the disciples believe the problem is?

- 4) What does Jesus think the problem is?

- 5) How is Jesus using the things of earth to help the disciples set their minds on the things of God? Consider both his words to the Pharisees/Sadducees and his words to the disciples.

Day Two

Read Matthew 16:13-28

- 1) (1) What is Jesus' reaction to Peter's claim that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?
- 2) (2) What is Jesus' reaction to Peter's rebuke in v 22?
- 3) (3) What does this contrast tell us about Peter's faith?
- 4) (4) Jesus rebukes Peter in v 23, what has Peter set his mind on and how is it not things of God?

Day Three

Read Matthew 17:1-13

- 1) Describe what the disciples see.
- 2) What do they hear?
- 3) What command is spoken by the Father in Heaven? How will obedience to that command solve the problem revealed in 16:23?
- 4) How does Peter describe this event when he re-tells it in 2 Peter 1:16-21?
- 5) What does he declare to be greater than being an eye-witness to this glory? How does that emphasis clarify our understanding of the prophetic words Jesus spoke about his suffering and his resurrection?
- 6) Does this passage teach us how to set our minds on the things of God?

Read Matthew 17:14-20

- 1) What suffering occurs in this text? Again, there are multiple people with problems. Name the character and the problem from their perspective.

- 2) Jesus picks up a refrain from Moses' song in Deut 32 and calls the disciples the "faithless and twisted generation." This is the fifth time in the book and the third time in this discourse that Matthew records Jesus confronting the disciples for their "little faith." (6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20) What evidence of faithlessness is Jesus frustrated with?

- 3) Who is the authority in the story? How does he demonstrate that authority?

- 4) Reread v 19. What is the conflict the disciples need to understand? How will increased faith enable them to heal this boy, or to move mountains? How should this change how we approach challenges or celebrate our accomplishments?

- 5) How can we learn from the disciples' struggle? How does the command of God in 17:5 provide us with the key for victory?

Read Matthew 17:22-27

- 1) Remember, the original readers of the gospel according to Matthew already knew that Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension had already occurred. How does that truth inform the emphasis of Jesus' prophecy in verse 22? What light does it shed on the disciples' response? Were they being good listeners? What were their minds set on?

- 2) A word of history: The two-drachma tax was not a Roman tax, it was a temple tax. Read Exodus 30:13-22. What was the purpose of the tax?

- 3) How does this help us understand why Jesus speaks to Peter about being a son of the king?

- 4) Jesus has demonstrated his authority over the demons (v. 18), his authority over the future of his own life and death (v. 23) and here he demonstrates his authority over creation (v. 27). How do these events contribute to the disciples' faith and their ability to set their minds on the things of God? How do these stories do that for you?

Day One

Read all of Matthew 18.

(The questions will be drawn from verses 1-6)

In the entire discourse, Peter has been the only disciple with a “speaking part.” James and John were named as being with Jesus and Peter at the transfiguration, but they do not speak. The rest of the disciples are only included as “the disciples.” Even when they speak they are identified as a group. In striking contrast, Peter has walked on water -- and faltered (14:29), Peter asked for the explanation of the parable (15:15), Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ (16:16), Peter and the rock and the keys to the kingdom are somehow connected (16:18-19), Peter was also the subject of Jesus’ greatest rebuke (16:23). However, Peter still accompanied Jesus to the transfiguration -- and the text only records Peter’s comments. And in the previous verse, Jesus had paid Peter’s temple tax.

Are the rest of the disciples feeling second-class? Are they thinking about the kingdom of heaven from the perspective of earth when they ask who is the greatest? Jesus challenges them to set their minds on the things of God by turning their thinking upside-down. (18:1)

- 1) Who did Jesus identify as the greatest? What characteristics make this one great?
- 2) Don’t you just love the way that Jesus teaches? He uses a visual illustration - - like we do with children -- to teach grown ups to become like children. Describe (or draw!) Jesus’ illustration.
- 3) How does one achieve kingdom greatness? (consider the action verbs in verses 3 & 4)
- 4) On earth, “the greatest” is a place occupied by a single entity. Greatest is not plural. How do Jesus’ words in verses 5 & 6 demonstrate that he is truly the greatest?
- 5) What ought our posture before this One be?

Day Two

Read all of Matthew 18 again.

(These questions will focus on verses 7-9)

A woe is a word of divine judgment expressed with deep grief. The Old Testament prophets pronounced woes so this was familiar language to the Israelites. However, Jesus pronounced more woes than any of the prophets.

- 1) In Matthew 18:7 Jesus pronounces two woes. What are they and how do they relate to verses 5 and 6?

- 2) Vs. 7 tells us that temptations are necessary but doesn't say why. What do these verses tell us about the necessity of temptation? 1 Peter 1:6-7; James 1:3-5

- 3) Jesus continues to radically challenge the disciples mind-set-on-earth vs. mind-set-on-God paradigm. We have seen Jesus heal the lame and give sight to the blind. However, in verse 7 & 8, what does say to demonstrate that holiness is far superior to physical wholeness? Why?

- 4) In verse 10, Jesus reminds us that he is still speaking of "little ones." As we put this context all together, who is included in this tender phase? How are the "little ones" protected?

- 5) Jesus points the eyes of the disciples-who-wanted-greatness to the amazing relationship of the Heavenly Father and his "little ones." How does the contrast between this image and the woes of verse 7 help us set our minds on the things of God?

Read all of Matthew 18 again. (*Focusing on verses 10-14*)

Read Ezekiel 34:1-24

This imagery of the Lord God as the good shepherd ought to have been firmly planted in the minds of the Israelites. The promises of Ezekiel 34 had been made hundreds of years earlier. They knew that the Good Shepherd would both tenderly care for his own (“seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the weak”) and judge the imposters with justice (“the fat and strong I will destroy”).

- 1) How does the Ezekiel 34 imagery of the failing shepherds parallel the woes of Matthew 18:7-8?

- 2) How does the description of the Lord God as the Shepherd of Israel (Ezekiel 34) parallel the care of the shepherd in Matthew 18:12-14?

- 3) How does the Ezekiel 34 text confirm the Father’s will as referenced in Matthew 18:14?

- 4) How does all of this cause you to aspire to be a little one rather than a great one? How does this aspiration affect the decisions you make today?

Read all of Matthew 18 again.

(The questions focus on verses 15-20)

From the Father-Child relationship, Jesus now points to the brother-to-brother relationship.

- 1) Based on the discussion in verses 1-14, what is the criteria for brotherhood?

- 2) How does the image of the Good Shepherd seeking out a single sheep define the effort we ought to put into restoring our relationship with a brother?

- 3) How does the shepherd imagery of caring for the weak and rejecting the “fat and strong” help us understand the binding and loosing that Jesus speaks of in verse 18?

- 4) How do the corporate images of “two or three witnesses” (v. 16) and “two or three gathered *in my name*” (v. 20) help us further submit to Jesus’ definition of greatness?

Read all of Matthew 18 again.

(The questions focus on verses 21-35)

Humans are imitators by divine design. We were made in the image of another: God himself. Our desire to imitate others and our need to learn by imitating something that we already know are all part of our Creator's good design. So, when we see Jesus teaching paradigm-altering concepts (setting our minds on things of God and not on the things of earth) through the physical illustration of a child (Matthew 18:2) and now through a story to which the disciples could easily relate, we know that he is not speaking down to disciples, rather that he is teaching them according to the nature that he has given to them. It is an act of love to increase their understanding.

- 1) Peter asks a question of law and logic in verse 21. He is looking for information. Jesus responds with a story that evokes emotion. What emotions are stirred in you as you read the story in verses 23-35?

- 2) Mercy is a gift that can only be granted by the person who has the authority to punish. How ought the rebuke in verse 33 shape our understanding of forgiveness? How does that help us understand our relationship with the sinful brother in vs. 15-20? Or the little one earlier in the chapter?

- 3) Throughout this discourse we have seen Jesus emphasize the contrast between setting our minds on God and setting our minds on the things of the earth. In chapter 18, Jesus has pointed our eyes toward the kingdom of heaven by showing us the Father. (vs. 10, 14, 19, 35) How do these portraits of the Father who is in heaven stir your heart to love? According to verse 35, how ought they affect your relationship with your brother?

- 4) Take time today to review the lessons you have learned through these last three weeks. How have the stories of Jesus, the portraits of the Father, and the example of the disciples motivated your heart to set your mind on the things of God? How does this mindset affect the way you live?