

Sunday, March Twelfth

In the movie *Mean Girls*, Lindsay Lohan's character (Cady) finds herself at a new school with nobody she knows. While she originally connects with some of the "rejects" at the school, she is eventually invited to sit with a group of popular girls at lunch. Cady quickly learns from these popular girls that it is not ok to interact with or sit with the "rejects." In today's passage, the Pharisees warn Jesus not to sit with the "rejects."

Read: Matthew 9:9-38

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How do the Pharisees react to Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners? (see verses 10-11) How does Jesus respond to them? (see verses 12-13)

Jesus was not afraid to sit with people who had been rejected by society. How does His example encourage you to consider who you are willing to interact with?

- Why did Jesus' disciples not fast? (see verses 14-15)
- What is the defining characteristic of the synagogue leader (v. 18), the bleeding woman (v. 21), and the two blind men (v. 28)? In other words, why did Jesus heal them?

In all three instances, the people *believed* that Jesus could heal them (or their family members) of their illnesses. They didn't hope that He could or wish that He could; they had *faith* that He would. Jesus confirms this relationship between faith and healing: "Your faith has healed you" (v. 22) and "According to your faith let it be done to you" (v. 29). How do these examples shape your understanding of what it means to have faith or to believe?

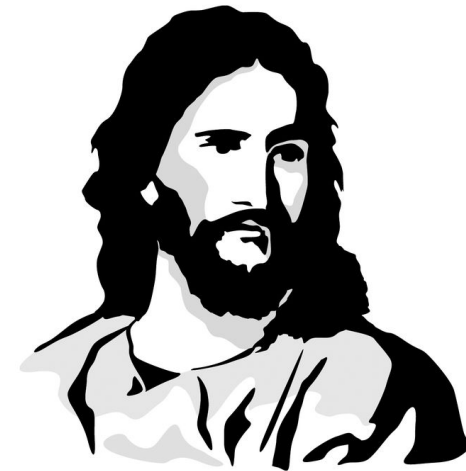
Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Jesus comments that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few (see verse 37). Take some time today to pray that God would continue to send out laborers into His harvest field to share the good news of Jesus with those around them (v. 38).

Read through the Bible



Matthew Week Two



Monday, March Sixth

On July 1, 2003, Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment banning cigarette smoking in workplaces, restaurants, and many public venues. While the ban was largely effective, smokers quickly found ways to get around the law, particularly by “vaping.” The rise of this new form of smoking eventually led to an amendment in 2018, which expanded the original ban to include vaping. In today’s passage, Jesus clarifies some Old Testament laws and commands.

Read: Matthew 5:17-32

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How righteous must one be in order to enter into heaven? (see verse 20) How do Paul’s words in Philippians 3:7-9 help us understand how we can obtain this righteousness?

Jesus said that the Old Testament teachings and commands would be fulfilled (v. 17), but who would fulfill them? In this passage, Jesus begins to lay the groundwork that we cannot be made righteous by following the Law. Instead, we are made righteous through faith in Jesus because only He can fulfill them all.

- How does Jesus broaden our understanding of murder? (see verses 21-22) How should we respond when someone wrongs us? (see verses 23-25)
- How does Jesus constrict our understanding of divorce? (see verses 31-32)

Back in Jesus’ day, husbands could divorce their wives for virtually any reason. This was based on a loose interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 – rabbis and teachers interpreted “uncleanness” as a general dissatisfaction with one’s spouse. However, Jesus only gives marital unfaithfulness as the defining situation of “uncleanness.” In this sense, Jesus upholds marriage as an important union before God that should not be casually ended.

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

Who might you need to reconcile with today before going to God?

Saturday, March Eleventh

Have you ever played the game *Guess Who*? The point of the game is to figure out who the other player’s mystery person is by narrowing down the group of possible people it could be. The more you find out about the person, the easier it becomes to determine who she or he is. “Does your person have blonde hair?” “Does your person have a mustache?” “Does your person wear glasses?” “Is your person Franz?” In today’s passage, a variety of people start to piece together who Jesus is.

Read: Matthew 8:23-9:8

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What did the disciples learn about Jesus’ power and authority in the middle of the storm? (see 8:26-27)
- What did the townspeople learn about Jesus’ power and authority in His interaction with the demons? (see 8:28-32)
- What did the teachers of the law learn about Jesus’ power and authority in His healing of a paralyzed man? (see 9:2-6)

Back then, people were trying to figure out who Jesus was. Was He a prophet? A sorcerer? Was He sent from God? Could He be the Messiah they had been waiting for? In these three different instances, the people were starting to see the full extent of Jesus’ power and authority on display: He could control natural events (8:23-27), He could command those in the spiritual realm (8:28-34), and He could even forgive sins (9:1-8). What kind of man could do all of these things?!

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

Back then, people responded differently to Jesus’ power and authority. For example, the people who saw Him heal the demon-possessed men were scared and asked Him to leave, while the people who saw Him heal a paralyzed man praised God for this miracle. Given what you’ve learned about Jesus so far, how might you respond to His power and authority today?

Friday, March Tenth

Seasoned marathon runners know that in order to be successful, they have to consider all that is required of them before running a race. How will they train? What will they wear? What foods will they eat? What will they do if they get a leg cramp? In today's passage, Jesus encourages His followers to consider all that is required to follow Him.

Read: Matthew 8:1-22

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How does Jesus respond to both the man with the skin disease and the centurion? (see verses 3 and 7)

Notice the words of the man with the skin disease: "...you can make me clean" (v. 3). Notice also the words of the centurion: "...just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (v. 7). Both men didn't question whether or not Jesus had the ability to heal. Instead, they had faith that He could heal if He wanted to. Jesus was clearly impressed by their faith (see verses 4 and 10).

- In what manner was the servant healed? (see verse 13)
- How does Jesus describe what is required to follow Him? (see verses 18-22)

Imagine coming across somebody who was healing people of their diseases left and right. At first glance, it would seem pretty cool to follow this miracle worker around, right? Jesus, however, didn't want them to get the impression that following Him would be exciting and glamorous. Instead, they would have to follow Him from one place to the next (v. 20), and they would have to leave everything behind to do so (v. 22). Notice that Jesus didn't tell the two men that they couldn't follow Him, but He did want them to know what was required of them.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Make a list of things you have had to give up over the years by following Jesus. What has been your greatest sacrifice?

Tuesday, March Seventh

Have you ever told something to your family members or friends, and in return, they gave you a look like they didn't believe you? Chances are, when you saw the looks on their faces, you probably tried to plead your case as to why they should believe you. "No, I promise you, that's what happened! I swear on my great-grandmother Gertrude's grave!" In today's passage, Jesus shows us why swearing on something or somebody may not be the best approach in our interactions with others.

Read: Matthew 5:33-6:4

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Instead of making oaths ("I swear on my...), how does Jesus say we should respond to others? (see 5:33-37)
- How does Jesus say we are to respond to our enemies and those in need? (see 5:38-48)

Wait a second...is Jesus saying that we should accept physical abuse from others when He says that we should turn the other cheek when someone strikes us (v. 39)? It's important to note that Jesus isn't advocating physical violence; He is using a figure of speech. Back then, people would have understood Jesus' teaching as how they were to respond to an insult from someone, not a physical attack. This is like Jesus' figure of speech in yesterday's reading on adultery (vv. 27-30) – people shouldn't actually cut off their body parts. Instead, they should remove that temptation from their life so as not to cause harm to their entire self.

- How are we to give to the needy, and what should we be sure to avoid? (see 6:1-4)

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (5:44). Take some time today to pray for the difficult people in your life. Afterwards, consider how you might show love to one of those people within the next week.

Wednesday, March Eighth

There's a stereotype out there that people who drive fancy hot rods are less concerned about getting from one place to another and more concerned about showing off their rides. Of course, this isn't true for everybody who drives a sports car, but their portrayal in movies and TV shows has caused people to question drivers' motives in owning these types of cars. In today's passage, Jesus questions the motives of those who are praying in public spaces.

Read: Matthew 6:5-34

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- When praying, what are some things we should do and not do? (see verses 5-8)
- What is the prerequisite for receiving forgiveness of sins? (see verses 14-15) How does this relate to 5:23-24?

Jesus doesn't give us the option of whether or not we should forgive those who have wronged us. His imperative is clear – if we forgive others, God forgives us. If we do not, we are not forgiven.

- Why aren't we able to serve two masters? (see verse 24)

Imagine that you have two jobs – one at Mazarro's and another at the Kopper Kitchen. Both require you to work Monday through Friday from 9 am to 5 pm. You can't possibly work them both at the same time, so what do you do? Ultimately, you have to choose one over the other. This is the heart of Jesus' message: we can't possibly serve two masters because we will always have to choose one over the other. Where might you be storing up treasures?

- What should we do when we find ourselves worrying? (see verses 33-34)

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

What circumstances are you currently worrying about in your life? How might Jesus' words in verses 25-34 give you clarity and peace?

Thursday, March Ninth

In the mid-2000s, MTV aired a speed dating show called *Next*. Each episode followed this general formula: a girl would stand in front of a bus, and then, one by one, guys would come out of the bus. If the girl judged the guy to be attractive and/or her type, they would go on a date. If she did not like how the guy looked, she would yell, "Next!", and a new guy would come out of the bus. In today's passage, Jesus provides some guidance on judging other people.

Read: Matthew 7:1-29

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What does Jesus say we are to do before showing somebody the error of her or his ways? (see verses 1-5)
- Where do the narrow and wide gates lead? (see verses 13-14)
- How does Jesus define a true prophet? (see verses 15-19)
- How does Jesus define a true disciple? (see verses 21-23)

These verses are often quoted by Christians as some of the most troubling words of Jesus. The worry often goes like this: "What if Jesus says these words – 'I never knew you' – to *me*?" However, notice Jesus' emphasis: 'never.' In these verses, Jesus isn't referring to believers who know Him through faith in Him. Instead, He is speaking about people He *never* knew, and thus, people who *never* knew Him. On the day of judgment, all people will plead to join Jesus in heaven, but only the people He knows (i.e. His believers who also know Him) will enter the kingdom of heaven.

- Why were the crowds amazed by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount? (see verses 28-29)

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Skim through the various sections in the Sermon on the Mount that you've read over the past few days (chapters 5-7). How might you more thoughtfully and intentionally put Jesus' words into practice (see verse 24-27)?