

Sunday, March Nineteenth

In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey gives up all of his hopes and dreams to save the town he loves. Going to college? Traveling around the world? Becoming rich? George tossed aside all of those dreams for Bedford Falls. In today's passage, Jesus tells His disciples what He is willing to give up for the world.

Read: Matthew 13:36-58

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How does Jesus describe the meaning behind the parable of the weeds in the field? (see verses 37-43) How is the parable of the net similar? (see verses 47-50)
- What did the man and the merchant both do in response to finding their treasure? (see verses 44-46)

It seems pretty illogical that someone would give up everything they have for one little treasure, but that's how much it means to them. In the same way, it seems pretty illogical that God would give up everything (including His own life) for little people like us, but that's how much we mean to Him!

- Why didn't Jesus perform miracles in His hometown? (see verses 57-58)

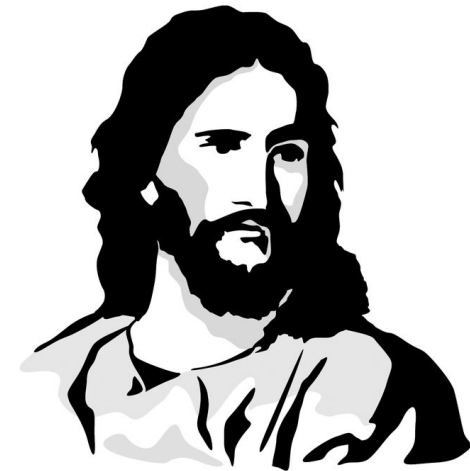
Think back to Jesus' healing miracles from last week: the man with the skin disease (8:3), the centurion (8:7), the synagogue leader (9:18), the bleeding woman (9:21), and the two blind men (9:28). In each instance, Jesus' desire to perform a miracle of healing on them was predicated by their faith that He could do so. In today's passage, Jesus continues this relationship between miracles and faith by refusing to perform any miracles to the faithless people of His hometown.

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

Take some time today to thank God for giving Himself up fully on the cross as a demonstration of His love for us.

Read through the Bible

Matthew
Week Three



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Monday, March Thirteenth

Over the years, some Christians have taken what is called a “faith journey.” The concept goes a little something like this: Christians set out on a journey through a city or area to share the Gospel with people. This journey usually lasts a few weeks, and they take nothing with them. No money. No belongings. No transportation. No technology. All they have are the clothes they’re wearing. Along the way, they trust God to provide for their daily needs. In today’s passage, Jesus’ disciples go on a “faith journey” of their own.

Read: Matthew 10:1-31

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What authority did Jesus give to His disciples? (see verse 1)
- Who were the disciples to go to? Who were they to stay away from? (see verses 5-6)

It’s important to note that Jesus isn’t suggesting that the Gospel is *only* for the Jews, but rather, that it *begins* with the Jews. In other words, these “lost sheep of Israel” (v. 6) are the ones through whom the Gospel will spread to the ends of the earth. Paul puts it like this: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: *first* to the Jew, *then* to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16).

- What does Jesus tell them to expect as they go on this mission? (see verses 16-18; 23)
- How does Jesus encourage them? (see verses 19-20, 26-31)

Christians are often afraid to share their faith because they fear how others might respond. Jesus doesn’t dance around this issue: some people will not respond well when you share your faith with them (see verses 16-18, 23). However, this shouldn’t stop us from doing so...our God is with us every step of the way (vv. 19-20)!

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

What is your greatest fear or concern in sharing your faith with others? How might you ask God to help you overcome it?

Saturday, March Eighteenth

Many children’s books are filled with fantastical tales of dragons, genies, mermaids, princesses, pirates, and even trolls. The stories usually follow a similar formula – the main character sets out on a journey, she or he eventually makes a wrong decision and falls into the hands of a villain, and she or he then works to get away from the villain and head to safety. While these stories are filled with excitement, horror, and a variety of twists and turns, they also carry moral lessons with them. For example, Hansel and Gretel learn that just because something is appealing (a candy house) doesn’t mean it’s good for you (they ended up getting captured by an evil witch while eating it). In today’s passage, Jesus speaks to His disciples and others in parables as a way of conveying important life lessons on issues of faith.

Read: Matthew 12:46-13:35

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How does Jesus define a family member? (see 12:46-50)

You would think that Jesus’ mother, Mary, and His brothers would have special privileges and access to Him. However, Jesus takes this opportunity to broaden our understanding of family: those who do the will of God are considered members of His family. This is why we call fellow believers our “brothers and sisters in Christ.”

- Why did Jesus tell His disciples that they’re blessed? (see 13:16-17)
- Why did Jesus speak to the crowds in parables? (see 13:10-15 and 34-35)

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

How does Jesus’ definition of “family” change the way you view fellow Christians? Consider, for example, a believer who you have had a hard time with lately. Maybe she or he has hurt you, or maybe you can’t stand being around that person. How might you work to view and treat that fellow Christian like a brother or sister?

Friday, March Seventeenth

You walk into your kitchen one morning, and you make a startling discovery: you have ants (FYI - swarming season is upon us!). After breakfast, you run to Home Depot to find some ant traps, but after looking at all the different options, you're not sure which one to get. How do you know which one will actually work? While you're standing there, an employee comes over to offer advice. "Oh, you don't want to get that one. I've tried it. It doesn't work well at all. This other brand, though, is really good. Give it 48 hours, and those ants will be gone!" In today's passage, Jesus shows how you can distinguish the good from the bad.

Read: Matthew 12:22-45

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What do the people call Jesus in verse 23?

Remember at the very beginning of this Gospel when Matthew referred to Jesus as "the son of David" in his genealogy (1:1)? After seeing Jesus heal a demon possessed man in 12:22, people were starting to catch on that He might actually be that "son" from the line of David who would come to fulfill God's promises.

- Who do the Pharisees think Jesus is? (see verse 24)
- What sin will not be forgiven? (see verses 31-32)

Many Christians struggle with these verses because they fear they have committed the "unforgiveable sin." However, believers have no need for concern. Simply put, to blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to willfully reject His ministry of testifying to Jesus. Because we believe this testimony (i.e. the Gospel), we are saved, and thus do not have to worry that we will commit this "unforgiveable sin."

- How does Jesus use Jonah and the Queen of the South to describe what is about to happen to Him? (see verses 39-42)

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

Jesus tells us that a tree is recognized by its fruit (v. 33). Consider at least one way that you can "bear good fruit" to someone today.

Tuesday, March Fourteenth

Back in December of 2018, the St. Petersburg City Council voted to ban plastic straws from restaurants, bars, and other businesses. The "phase-out" was scheduled to take place over a series of months, with the ban taking full effect in 2020. Hours after the vote, people took to social media and other outlets to express their feelings about this rather divisive ban. Some people thought it was a great step toward protecting the environment, while others thought it was a gross overreach of a local government to tell businesses what they can and can't do. In today's passage, Jesus tells His disciples why His Gospel will be a divisive message.

Read: Matthew 10:32-42

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Why is it important for Christians to acknowledge Jesus before other people? (see verses 32-33)
- What did Jesus come to bring? (see verses 34-36)

Wait a second...why would Jesus say He hadn't come to bring peace? Don't we pray for the "peace of Christ" to rule in our hearts (see Colossians 3:15)? Aren't we supposed to be "peacemakers" (see Matthew 5:9)? Jesus' Gospel is indeed a message of peace, but that very same message ends up dividing people like a sword. Some people receive Jesus while others reject Him (even within our own families).

- What makes someone "worthy" of Jesus? (see verses 37-39)

We often think of idolatry in terms of things like golden calves or money. But, as Jesus points out, we can also come to idolize people. While we can love our family and friends, Jesus makes it clear that we must love Him supremely.

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

Think about how being a follower of Jesus has caused division between you and some of your family members, friends, and neighbors. Spend some time praying for these people in your life.

Wednesday, March Fifteenth

Most bands today have an opening act at their concerts in which a lesser known or “up-and-coming” artist performs. The idea is to give the new artists practice and exposure. For example, singers Katy Nichole and David Leonard opened for the Christian band CAIN this past Friday night in Clearwater. In today’s passage, Jesus has an interaction with some followers of His “opening act.”

Read: Matthew 11:1-30

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Why did John send His disciples to Jesus? (see verses 2-3)

Scholars are divided as to why John the Baptist sent His disciples to Jesus to ask if He was “the one to come” (v. 3). After all, didn’t John already baptize Him? Didn’t he already know who Jesus was? Some scholars believe that John sent his followers not because *he* didn’t know who Jesus was, but rather, because he wanted *his followers* to know Jesus for themselves. Others suggest that John, rotting away in prison, was confused about Jesus’ ministry. If this was the Messiah, why hadn’t things happened yet? While it is unclear what John was thinking, the message his followers brought back likely provided peace and comfort to John (see verses 5-6).

- Who does Jesus say that John is? (see verse 14)

Back then, many Jews would have been familiar with the prophecy that the prophet Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah (see Malachi 4:5). While John the Baptist was not actually Elijah, He fulfilled the nature and purpose of Elijah’s return. In this sense, John was the Elijah the Jews had been waiting for.

- Why did Jesus denounce certain cities? (see verses 20-21)

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

Take a look back at verses 28-30. What area of your life do you need rest from? How might you ask Jesus for that rest, specifically for your “soul” (v. 29)?

Thursday, March Sixteenth

Suppose you go for a walk one day at Lake Seminole Park. As you walk around the lake, you suddenly come across a person who appears to be drowning. The park rules clearly state you can’t go into the lake, so what do you do? Do you try and save the drowning person, or do you follow the rules and not go into the lake? In today’s passage, Jesus challenges the Pharisees with a similar dilemma.

Read: Matthew 12:1-21

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What was Jesus’ response to the charge that His disciples were breaking the Sabbath? (see verses 3-5)

Jesus challenged the Pharisees to determine what was more important: rules or people. For example, if somebody is starving, in the name of not breaking a rule, do you let her starve? Of course not. For Jesus, meeting a person’s need was more important.

- What was Jesus greater than? (see verse 6)

In 1st century Judaism, there was nothing greater than the temple in Jerusalem because that was the place where God dwelled. The only thing greater than the temple, of course, was the One who dwelled in the temple. If Jesus was saying that something (Himself) was greater than the temple (v. 6), then that meant that He was also saying He was God! Notice, also, where Jesus was saying all of this – in a field of grains (v. 1). In other words, He was outside of the temple, and thus, not in the place where God dwelled. Which means that if Jesus was God, then the presence of God no longer dwelled in the temple. Instead, He dwelled amongst the people (and, in this case, He was standing right next to the Pharisees)!

- What was Jesus’ response to whether or not it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath? (see verses 11-12)

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

Continue yesterday’s application by taking some “Sabbath” time!