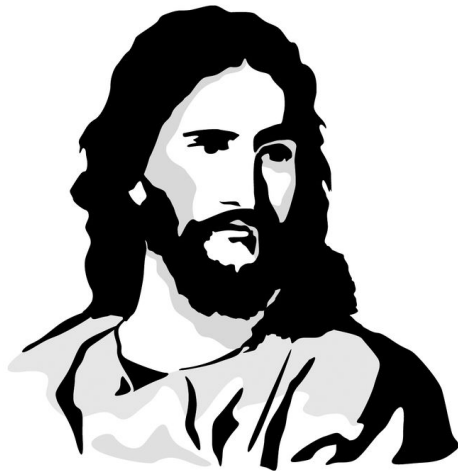


Read through the Bible

Matthew Week Four



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Monday, March Twentieth

Throughout World War II, many American spouses and families anxiously waited for news of their loved ones overseas. “Is my husband ok?” “Was my brother on board that ship when it was destroyed?” Some families received responses to their inquiries that were absolutely devastating. “Your husband died in battle.” “Your brother was on that ship.” When people receive news of suffering or death, they often take time to process the magnitude of the news they just received. In today’s passage, Jesus takes time to process some devastating news He’s just received.

Read: Matthew 14:1-21

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What happened to John the Baptist? (see verses 3-12) Why did Herod think he had risen from the dead? (see verses 1-2)
- How did Jesus respond to the news of John the Baptist’s death? (see verse 13)

When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had died, He wanted to be alone. As people who have lost loved ones in our own lives, we can certainly empathize with what Jesus might have been feeling. This verse reminds us of the “fully-man” aspect of Jesus: He too experienced sadness, hurt, and suffering as we do today.

- What did Jesus do before He distributed the loaves and fish? (see verse 19)

How did you learn to pray? Did someone like your parents or your neighbors teach you? Did you learn by attending church? Chances are, someone modeled it for you. By giving thanks to the Father before distributing the loaves and fish, Jesus modeled a spirit of thankfulness to the crowds of people who had come to see Him.

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

If you are not already doing so, take some time to pray before each meal this week. Then, take some time on Sunday to consider what you have learned from “giving thanks” more intentionally.

Tuesday, March Twenty-First

We live in such a beautiful area, don't we? While the Tampa Bay area is known for a lot of things (sunshine, Cuban sandwiches, Gasparilla, the Dali Museum, the lightning capital of the world...), we are perhaps best known for our beaches. In fact, on any given day of the week, you can go out to one of our beaches and see people driving on a jet ski, gliding on a parasail, paddling on a surfboard, or even cycling on a water bike. The only thing you definitely won't see is somebody walking on water. In today's passage, Jesus decides to visit His disciples by doing just that.

Read: Matthew 14:22-36

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What did Jesus do before catching up with His disciples? (see verse 23)
- How did the disciples respond to Jesus walking on the water? How did Jesus assure them? (see verses 26-27)
- Why did Peter begin to sink? (see verses 29-30)

You've got to give Peter credit here, especially since none of the other disciples seemed to possess the faith to step out of the boat! Still, he didn't have the faith to make it all the way to Jesus. But notice that when Peter began to sink, Jesus came to *him!* This exchange between Peter and Jesus reminds us that even in our moments of doubt, the good news of the Gospel is that we have a God who comes to us to meet us where we're at.

- How did the disciples respond to Jesus' walk on the water? (see verse 33)

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

If you want to walk on water, you have to first step out of the boat! Think about a future goal or a situation you have been putting off for quite some time. How might you ask Jesus to give you the faith to take that first step? Spend some time in prayer as you mull over this goal or situation.

Wednesday, March Twenty-Second

When preschool teachers get their students ready to eat lunch, the first thing they do is have them wash their hands. After all, kids often spend the morning touching a bunch of toys and playing in the dirt outside. Scientists agree that handwashing can help prevent the spread of germs, especially before a meal. In today's passage, Jesus' disciples are called out for not washing their hands.

Read: Matthew 15:1-28

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' accusation that His disciples don't wash their hands before they eat? (see verses 3-9)

You know that phrase, "Do as I say, not as I do"? In our passage today, Jesus called out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees by showing that even they fall short of following God's commands (vv. 3-7).

- What makes a person unclean? (see verses 10-11 and 17-20)
- Take a look at the different ways that Jesus responded to the Canaanite woman in verses 22-28. What ultimately convinced Jesus to grant her request? (see verse 28)

Why would Jesus initially withhold His ability to heal the Canaanite woman's daughter? Historically, the Canaanites were one of Israel's great enemies. Because Jesus had come first for the "lost sheep of Israel" (v. 24; also see last week's passage – 10:6), the disciples thought that Jesus would not waste His time interacting with this Gentile (v. 23). But once Jesus witnessed her faith in Him, He granted her request and healed her daughter.

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

The Canaanite woman did not give up when asking Jesus to heal her daughter (see verses 22, 25, and 27). Is there a prayer request you have given up on lately? If so, how might you renew that request with persistence by bringing it to Jesus in faith?

Thursday, March Twenty-Third

Every now and then, a church will put up a cutesy sign in the hopes of drawing people into their sanctuary. For example, “TOO COLD TO CHANGE SIGN. MESSAGE INSIDE.” Or “NOW IS A GOOD TIME TO VISIT. OUR PASTOR IS ON VACATION.” Perhaps you’ve seen this one before: “IF YOU’RE LOOKING FOR A SIGN, THIS MIGHT BE IT.” In today’s passage, the Pharisees and the Sadducees look for a sign from Jesus.

Read: Matthew 15:29-16:12

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ call to feed the thousands of people? (see 15:33)

This miracle seems very similar to the feeding of the 5000 in Matthew 14, except there is one important difference – location! When Jesus fed the 5000, He was in a predominately Jewish area, but when He fed the 4000, He was in a predominately Gentile area. In this sense, Jesus was sending a clear message to His disciples that He had come to provide for *all* people – both Jew and Gentile.

- What sort of sign were the Pharisees and Sadducees looking for? (see 16:1) How does Jesus’ response in 16:4 connect with His response in 12:38-42?

The Pharisees and Sadducees had heard of many of Jesus’ earthly signs, but that wasn’t good enough. They wanted a sign *from heaven*. But what they didn’t seem to understand was that Jesus was the sign from heaven! Much like Jonah was in the belly of a big fish for three days, so was Jesus going to die and then rise from the dead on the third day (see 12:38-42).

- What was the yeast a metaphor for? (see 16:8-12)

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

Take some time today to thank God for the ways He has provided for you in this season of your life.

Friday, March Twenty-Fourth

On March 29, 1966, a new musical opened up on Broadway: “*It’s a Bird...It’s a Plane...It’s Superman!*” While the musical was based around the figure of Superman, the title suggested that not everyone knew who Superman was...yet. For example, when people looked up in the sky and saw something flying, some thought it was a bird; others, a plane. But some knew exactly what (or shall we say *who*) it was: Superman! In today’s passage, Jesus finds that the people are unsure as to who He is. However, one of the disciples correctly identifies Jesus in front of His other followers, and Jesus commends him for his faith.

Read: Matthew 16:13-28

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Who did the crowds think Jesus was? (see verse 14) Who did Peter say Jesus was? (see verse 16)

The Jews used the term “son of the living God” as a special reference to deity. In this sense, when Peter said that Jesus is the “son of the living God,” He was saying that Jesus was God Himself.

- How did Peter know Jesus was the Messiah? (see verse 17)
- Why did Jesus rebuke Peter? (see verses 22-23)

Just a few verses before, Peter had called Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God (v. 16). So, when Jesus said that He was going to be arrested, killed, and raised to life, you can imagine how difficult this must have been for Peter to take in. After all, why would God die? Certainly, He is greater than mere humans, right? Jesus’ rebuke in verse 23 demonstrates that Peter didn’t (or, perhaps, didn’t want to) understand God’s plan for salvation.

- How did Jesus define a disciple? (see verses 24-27)

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

If someone asked you who Jesus was and what it means to be His disciple, what would you say?

Saturday, March Twenty-Fifth

For a president's inauguration, it is customary for past presidents to come to the event. While they don't necessarily play an active role during the ceremony, they are still considered guests of honor. In today's passage, some folks from the past attend a miraculous moment during Jesus' public ministry.

Read: Matthew 17:1-27

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Who showed up at the Transfiguration? (see verse 3)

Why were these the two guys who showed up to talk to Jesus? Since there wasn't a "New" Testament yet, the people living in Jesus' time often referred to the Old Testament as the Law and the Prophets. The Law – which was the first five books of the Bible – was given by God to Moses, and Elijah was considered one of the greatest prophets of all time. Thus, on the top of this mountain, you had the representative of the Law (Moses) and you had the representative of the Prophets (Elijah), and the symbolic message was that the entire history of Israel – the Law and the Prophets – was pointing to Jesus as the Messiah.

- Why weren't the disciples able to drive out the demon from the young boy? (see verses 19-20)
- What did Jesus ask Peter to do? (see verse 27)

Back then, the temple tax was a tax that was supposed to be paid by all Jewish men. In order to not cause offense (v. 27), Jesus decided to pay the tax, but did so in a miraculous way (i.e. having Peter catch a fish with money in it). Notice, though, that Jesus didn't just cover the temple tax for Himself; He also covered it for Peter. In this sense, Jesus foreshadowed that He was willing to pay the price for others.

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

Spend some time in prayer thanking Jesus that He was willing to pay the price for you and for the rest of the world.

Sunday, March Twenty-Sixth

On the TV show *Intervention*, producers follow the daily life of a person with a serious addiction (often alcohol or drugs). After following the person around for a few days, the producers work with the family to stage an intervention. During the intervention, the person is given an ultimatum: either she or he checks into rehab, or she or he will be cut off from depending on family members for things like money and a place to stay. The goal is that the person will check into rehab as a first step in removing the addiction from her or his life. In today's passage, Jesus talks about how we remove temptations from our own lives.

Read: Matthew 18:1-9

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How did Jesus define what it means to be 'great' in the kingdom of heaven? (see verses 2-5)

Back then, children in Jewish society were not considered important. They were often overlooked and did not have many rights. In this sense, they had a lowly position. Thus, if Jesus' disciples were to be considered 'great', they would need to humble themselves by assuming the position of a child.

- What warning did Jesus give for those who tried to deceive the young and the humble? (see verses 6-7)
- What did Jesus say we should do when something is causing us to stumble? (see verses 8-9)

Jesus' words here are very similar to His words on adultery (see 5:27-30). He is not commanding people to cut off their body parts. Instead, He is saying that we should remove the thing causing us to stumble (often a temptation) so that we do not bring lasting harm to ourselves (vv. 8-9).

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

What temptation or stumbling block might you need to remove from your life? How might you ask Jesus for strength and help?