

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Gospels

January 7: Matthew 1-2 (Doug Twaddell)

Matthew 1-2

Matthew is also referred to as Levi (Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27). Before he followed Christ, he earned a living as a tax collector for the Roman government. He would have been disliked by most Jews and hated by some. The lack of oversight and wildly fluctuating tax valuations meant the occupation easily lent itself to exploitation of their fellows Jews. Because of the assumption of their corruption, under Jewish law tax collectors were not allowed to be judges or even witnesses at trial. It was undesirable to exchange money or do business with them because they might be in possession of stolen money. Often their families were viewed in this same light.

Matthew begins with a genealogy from Abraham to Christ. Comparing the genealogies here and in Luke can be very revealing. Matthew traces through David's son Solomon, while Luke goes through David's son Nathan. Proving that there is no doubt Jesus is qualified as a descendent of David to assume the royal throne. The two lists converge at Zerubbabel and then separate again to follow different sons of his. In Haggai 2:23, God tells Zerubbabel that he will be "like a signet ring." He is exactly that in the way he ties the two seemingly separate lines together.

While recognizing there are differences when comparing Matthew's list with Luke's, I also want to focus on the fact that there even is a list. Most Americans don't know the names of their great-great grandparents, let alone anything else about them. Those that work very hard may be able to find information some 500-1000 years in the past. Imagine being able to trace your personal history back some 4000 years and knowing intricate details about many of those people. This was vital, not just for a Jewish male, but for someone that would lay claim to the throne of David and claim to be the Messiah of prophecy.

The events of the birth and childhood of Jesus that Matthew records are all fulfillments of various prophecies by Isaiah, Micah, Hosea and Jeremiah specifically, but also others. In a concise and economical way, Matthew records for us all we need to know about Jesus' heritage, His birth, the need to run to Egypt as a young child to escape Herod's wrath fueled by paranoia and the final return of Jesus and His family to Israel when they settle in Nazareth.

Comment:

Christina McClung:
Thank you

Comment:

Michael Rogers:
And part of the proof that the state of Israel today and Judaism is NOT the holy nation selected by God anymore, is the fact that in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed, that ended the traceable lineage of Jews from that time. God's church is NOT a building or a nation anymore,

but the church of His beloved Son Jesus Christ, which is why we are known as the church of Christ. Thanks Doug Twaddell

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Thank you Doug. I loved the Zerubbabel reference. I also always find it fascinating about the five women mentioned in the lineage. Also I've had to use 1:24-25 before as a proof text that sex does not equal marriage. Joseph had clearly entered into a marriage commitment with Mary and God almost a year before he had a "union" with her.

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

Here is Rahab again! 5 mothers in the line of the Messiah finding deliverance, physical and spiritual, through the mercy of God! Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathseba, & Mary.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

The five prophecies mentioned are interesting with how they are stated:

1:22 Lord said through the prophet...about Immanuel which is a continuation of yesterday's study in Isa. 7

2:5 what the prophet has written...about Bethlehem in Micah 5:2

2:15 Lord said through the prophet...about return from Egypt Hos. 11:1

2:17 said through the prophet Jeremiah..about Rachel weeping who was buried in Bethlehem after she died in childbirth to Benjamin. Jer. 31:15

2:23 what was said through the PROPHETS (plural)...That He would be called a Nazarene. This one's interesting because we can't find an OT reference to it. Perhaps since prophets is plural it was just orally transmitted around as a common understanding that He would be from Nazareth. It seems more likely that by using the word Nazarene, Matthew was actually referring to the many prophecies of the Christ being despised, looked down upon and persecuted.

Regardless, Jesus acknowledged it to Paul, "And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." -Acts 22:8

Replies:

Charles Fry:

A common thought on "Nazarene" is that Matthew may have been referring to Isaiah 11:1, where the Messiah is called a "netser", or shoot (a branch) out of the root of Jesse. The name Nazareth may be derived from the same word..

Ginger Hermon:

So thankful for these prophecies. Last year we had a good study @ the camp out on Day 1 of the 6 month NT study. One prophecy we discussed in further detail was Rachel's weeping. Figuratively speaking, Rachel lamented her lost "children." In the OT, the occasion of Rachel's weeping was terrible suffering of her descendants. Israel had been taken into Assyrian & Babylonian captivity. The desolation was so heart-wrenching she refused to be comforted. However, the Lord spoke and instructed her to refrain

from crying. There would be a reward for her work of bringing children into the world. The Hebrew people had turned away from God, but through divine discipline they were brought to repentance and turned back to the Lord. In Matthew's day Rachel's death in childbirth on the way to Bethlehem is seen again with connection between Ramah and Bethlehem. As in Jeremiah, the situation is heart-wrenching as Rachel mourns her children being carried away. Yet the hope of salvation lives on. Jesus escapes! Just as Rachel was comforted with the promise that her children would be restored, so Matthew's readers are meant to understand that the long-awaited Messiah had been born and the hope of salvation was at hand. Prophecy had been fulfilled!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you Brother Doug Twaddell! I know you said "Most" which is different than "some," this isn't a boast but much father I've come! I have names of "greats" many in my family tree, and, can reach back a plenty to 1400 you see! (sorry, I couldn't resist!)

Comment:

Steven Wright::

Ok, I'll be serious now! (but seriously, I was serious when i said "Thank you earlier Doug Twaddell! and so, thank you again!) ok, here's this:

Comment:

Steve Wright:

Revisiting the question: "Why a Virgin Birth?"

1. The problem
 - a. (Genesis 49:10)
 - i. God announced very early that His plan for redemption involved the Messiah coming from the tribe of Judah.
 - ii. Specifically, from the line of David (Ruth 4:22; 2nd Samuel 7:11 – 16)
 - iii. The succession of Kings after David and Solomon however, proved to be for the most part, a pretty dismal line.
 1. Things go from bad to worse and eventually we encounter Jeconiah – upon whom God pronounces a "Blood curse" (Jeremiah 22:30)
 - a. This curse seems to create quite a grim and perplexing paradox:
 - i. The Messiah had to come from the royal line.
 - ii. But there is now a blood curse upon that very line!
 - b. but remember you cannot outmaneuver God – he has a contingency plan for every contingency!
2. The solution
 - a. The answer emerges in the "Differing" genealogies of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew and in Luke.
 - i. Matthew, in true Levitical fashion, focuses on the Messiahship of Jesus and presents him as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.
 1. So Matthew, (as any Jew would), traces the legal line from Abraham through David, then through Solomon (The royal line) to Joseph, the legal father of Jesus (Mt. 1: 1 – 17).

ii. Luke (on the other hand), as a physician, focuses on the humanity of Jesus and presents him as the Son of Man.

1. Luke traces the blood line from Adam (the first man) through David - - and his genealogy from Abraham to David is identical to Matthew's.

a. But then after David, Luke departs from the path taken by Matthew and traces the family tree through another son of David (the second surviving son from Bathsheba), Nathan, down to Heli, the father of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 3:23 – 38).

iii. But then, how can we have inheritance through a daughter, instead of a son?

1. There are two solutions for that problem:

a. 1st – I think we understand here that Matthew gives the real and actual descent of Joseph, and Luke the real and actual descent of Mary.

i. We can support this understanding/conclusion with the scripture:

1. The most natural meaning of “begat” is preserved in Matthews account.

a. Jesus comes from David's royal line and so fulfills prophecy.

b. It is not elsewhere stated that Mary is of Davidic descent (although the tracing out of the Names AFTER David in Luke's list will bear this out), there is presumptive evidence in the language of the angel to Mary in (Luke 1:32) and as well in the enrollment of Mary in (Luke 2:5).

2. we also note the lack of proper article with Joseph's name in Luke's list, whereas every other name on the list appears with the article.

a. This puts Joseph's name outside of the genealogical series properly so – called.

b. Indicating that Joseph belongs to the parenthesis “As was supposed.”

c. Making it read thus, “being son (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli.”

3. Luke had already clearly stated the manner of Christ's birth (we shall say some more about this also), so that no one would think he was the son of Joseph.

a. Jesus would then be the grandson of Heli, which also happens to be a perfectly and completely biblically allowable meaning of “son.”

i. (there is just no way of attacking this problem without finding a Biblical resolution – ONLY – the one true God could work such a thing at once so remarkable and miraculous as this!

ii. THEN WE HAVE . . .

3. Zelophehad

a. The law of Moses required inheritance to come through the sons of a father.

b. A notable exception was permitted however, in which inheritance should come through the daughters, if no sons were available and the daughter(s) married within her tribe (Num. 26:33; 27:1 – 11; 36:2 – 12; Joshua 17:3 – 6; 1st Chron. 7:15)

- i. The daughters of Zelophehad, petitioned Moses for a special exception, which was granted after they entered the land of Canaan under Joshua.
- ii. The claims of Christ can rely solely upon this particular exception granted to the family of Zelophehad.
 - 1. Heli, Mary's father, Like Zelophehad, was without sons, apparently.
 - 2. Mary married within the tribe of Judah.
 - 3. Jesus was born of Mary (though she was a virgin).
 - 4. So . . . Jesus was born of David and carried legal title to that line, but avoiding the blood curse of Jeconiah
 - 5. (Psalm 40:7)
- a. We also have a much . . .
 - 4. Earlier glimpse
- a. Although the point is worth emphasizing that there is no way for God to be out maneuvered, this plan of God's for bringing the Messiah, was no afterthought, or, post facto remedy.
 - i. It was first announced in (Gen. 3:15)
 - 1. That there a woman has "seed" is biologically true albeit, seemingly contradictory by what can be normally observed. (even today we speak of the male "sperm," with a seed, and for the woman we say she has "eggs.")
 - a. So it was that "Seed of the woman" while being a statement of biological fact, also became one of the prophetic titles of the Messiah; AND . . . the very first hint (in the third chapter of Genesis) of the virgin birth.
 - 5. Everything comes together in the intertwining of the two parts of Jesus' family tree.
 - a. And speaking of genealogies . . .
 - i. John also presents a genealogy, of sorts, of the Pre-Existent one in the first three verses of his account (Jn. 1: 1- 3) and then later connects with Matthew's AND Luke's at (Jn. 1:14)
 - ii. Which truth is also stated hundreds of years before John by the mouth of the prophet Micah (5:2).

Replies:

Charles Fry:

Paul wrote in Romans 1:3 "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,". Since he was not born of Joseph, according to the flesh, but was born of Mary, according to the flesh, those inferences from Luke about Mary too being a descendant of David must be more than suggestive.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Doug Twaddell, for leading our Saturday study in the Gospels. I appreciate your intro and thoughts above! We are very blessed to have four gospel writers and their unique insights. I'm thankful Matthew had a fondness for numbers. Thanks to this, he gives numerical

details, arranged contents of his book in a systematic way and mentions things only a person in his position would know. There is so much in these two short chapters!!!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

God chose the lineage of Judah for the scepter of the kingdom, as indicated in the prophetic blessings of Genesis 49. If it had been Jacob's choice the chosen lineage would have been that of Joseph (see the blessing of Ephraim in Genesis 48, and Judah and Joseph in Genesis 49). While Joseph is a prophetic shadow of Jesus, God didn't choose his line. However, I think there is an honorary nod given to Joseph and Jacob, in that Mary's husband was Joseph son of Jacob. 😊

January 14: Matthew 3-4 (Doug Twaddell)

January 14, 2017

Matthew 3-4

Matthew introduces us to Jesus' cousin, John, in the third chapter. We see that he lives the life of a recluse and may have followed the restrictions of the Nazarite vow. As he is baptizing people after they confess their sins (v6), many of the Jewish religious elite come to see what is going on. In a very short lesson, he gives them much of the information that Christ will also speak to them later. He calls them a "brood of vipers," tells them to "bear fruits worthy of repentance," informs them that they cannot lean on "Abraham as their father" adding that their "tree" is about to be "cut down" because it is not "bearing fruit." (vs7-10)

We also see what John knew to be part of his purpose. He points out that his baptism is for repentance, but the Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (v11). This has to be a prophecy about the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Not only would Christ Himself be greater than John, His purpose would be greater. He will separate the wheat from the chaff, meaning He would make a distinction between those that are acceptable to God from those that are not. (v12)

Matthew then gives us an account of Jesus' baptism. John objects at first, but then relents when Jesus explains that this is necessary. When Jesus "comes up out of the water," the voice of God is heard. The specific detail that He came up out of the water should not be overlooked. Not only does He come out of the water, He first comes up. In order to come up and out of something, it is only logical that you must be completely in it. Then there is the voice of God. There are very few times that God speaks aloud from heaven and most of those are in the Old Testament. This had to be an event of great magnitude and importance for God to lend His voice audibly to the proceedings. I wonder what the reaction of those standing there, including the religious elite, was to that sound.

Chapter 4 switches scenes to Jesus alone in the wilderness as Satan takes his best shots at derailing the purity and reputation of the Messiah. As Satan attempts this, he hurls three flaming darts at Him. Satan appeals to His hungry flesh by pointing out that Jesus has the ability to turn stones into bread. Satan also appeals to his pride by questioning whether God would really protect Him as He promised. Finally, Satan appeals to Jesus both as a man and as God by suggesting that he is willing to simply step aside and allow all mankind to worship Christ with Jesus knowing that then He would not have to suffer through the sacrifice of Himself for many that will never believe. Jesus defeats these attacks by quoting the word of

God. Yes, Satan also quoted the scriptures at one point, but he used it contrary to the point and context. Jesus used the scripture correctly and within the context of God's purpose.

After this, John is arrested and Jesus begins His public work. Verse 17 tells us that His primary message was this: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That message is the foundation and main purpose of the Messiah. Jesus begins to call those that will eventually be named as Apostles. As I look back at working side by side with my father and grandfather in the field or fixing fence, I have often thought about Zebedee's reaction to his sons simply walking away from the family business. Jesus then begins the process of letting people know who He is by healing many that were sick or paralyzed. It is worth noting that these were not "tricks" or "audience plants." Those that He healed were well known in their communities and there was no doubt about their illness or healing. Naturally, these miracles cause quite a stir and Jesus begins to amass a very large following.

Comment:

Sundy McClung:
Thank you.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
Thanks Doug! I'm really enjoying these outlines that the teachers are posting. It's very helpful.

3:11 says baptize with "the Holy Spirit and with fire". Although the Holy Spirit should be a fire within us that we should not "quench" and the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles "like" tongues of fire, I don't believe the fire mentioned in this verse is the Holy Spirit. If we look at the context of the verse John is now talking to a mixture of believers and the Pharisees "brood of vipers" that have just shown up. It is significant that verse 10, 11 and 12 all end with the word fire. In that context, in my opinion they all refer to the same thing. The judgement of sinners by Christ. John is in the middle of an accusatory speech and he is basically saying the Messiah will give peace and comfort through the Holy Spirit to those who repent and are baptized and obey God AND fiery judgement on the "brood of vipers" who do not.

"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."
Luke 7:29-30

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Thank you brother Doug Twaddell! The contextual application for the "baptism of fire" would indeed indicate the judgment and therefore the fires of hell for the disobedient. Because of the Two baptisms being mentioned together in the text and then explained farther into the text, with people jumping to a conclusion, before actually digesting the text, an easy confusion can occur ; since one of the signs that accompanied the Apostles being "Baptized" by the Holy Spirit" was the "cloven tongues of fire," resting on the heads of each apostle, people incorrectly think that is what it means. It doesn't! A certain incorrect cultural misappropriation also occurs, where the phrase "baptism of fire" is used to describe a very difficult trial or hardship. Yes, the scriptures do speak of "fiery trials" which we must endure, and we can certainly feel "Immersed" by such trials at times, but the fact remains that the clear, scriptural context of "Baptize with fire" is condemnation to the eternal fire of hell! Also regarding the

Nazarite vow, where normally an individual could voluntarily take that vow, imposing it upon themselves for what period of time they would designate (a year long term, seems to have been considered normal), in the case of Samson, Samuel, and John the Immerser, it was imposed by God and/or the child's parent (s). So also upon the mother's of these men prior to their conceiving them, since for these, the vow was to be upon them for the entirety of their lives. This also answers the question for us of, "when does a human life begin? " as far as God's perspective is concerned.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

I agree with Doug that the baptism of the Spirit is probably in reference to Acts 2 but it could also refer to Acts 10. As far as I understand it, we receive the Spirit when we are obedient to the water burial that He commanded but this is probably different than the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" prophesied in Joel where God poured out His Spirit upon man when establishing his Kingdom. This seems to have happened three times for the purpose of God demonstrating to the world whom He had chosen.

- 1.) Jesus (Matt 3)
- 2.) Apostles (Acts 2)
- 3.) Gentiles (Acts 10).

The third "baptism of the Holy Spirit" from on High is the most interesting because it happened before water immersion. This was God's demonstration to the Jews, that they shouldn't deny water immersion to the Gentiles because He had chosen to save them.

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

And he COMMANDED them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Acts 10:47-48

Replies:

Steven Wright:
for you Marc Hermon

Steven Wright:
not letting me post it . . .sorry!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

I wasn't sure if we should read the Bible straight through or do it in the 7 sections that we are attempting. I'm really happy we decided to do it this way. I've been totally amazed how so many of our readings have been so wonderfully connected. Reading Isaiah on Friday and then Matthew on Saturday has been exceptionally exciting. The last two weeks we've read some of the exact same words on both days. Matt 4:15-16

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

"A voice in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord!" One of the purposes of Jesus' baptism was to confirm His identity as Messiah.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

I agree that John the Baptist is laying out two alternatives, that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit or else Jesus would baptize with fire. Either new life by the Spirit, or else fiery judgment. I agree that the baptism of the Holy Spirit certainly occurred in Acts 2 and Acts 10, accompanied by signs, including speaking in other languages in both instances. Then I have a couple of "however"s. I don't know of a text that says Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit. I know he was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:16-21, Isaiah 61:1-2, Hebrews 1:9) and his anointing with the Holy Spirit was "by God" and included anointing with power (Acts 10:38). He is the Christ, Messiah, Anointed One, and his anointing with the Holy Spirit by God included power or authority.

Coming back to John's prophecy that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, which John couldn't do, again it seems to be either the Spirit or else the fire. No third alternative. Consequently, I have a strong notion that Jesus baptizes his followers with the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus, disciples receive an anointing (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 1 John 2:20, 27). This is in keeping with the way the holy anointing oil poured on the head of the high priest flowed down and his whole body was anointed (as in Psalm 133). Christians are anointed with the same Spirit Jesus was anointed with, but not the same power or authority.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as being poured out by Jesus in the prophecy of Joel quoted by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18), and Peter said Jesus had done it, as shown by the signs and wonders of the tongues (both the appearance of fire and the intelligible languages) and sound of wind (Acts 2:33). "He has poured out what you now see and hear." Likewise, what Peter refers to as being baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16) is also described by Luke as the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles (Acts 10:45). Paul also wrote that the love of God is "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who he has given to us" (Romans 5:5) and that we have "the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior," (Titus 3:5-6). So the events at Pentecost and in Cornelius house are described both as baptism with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit being poured out, and that metaphor of pouring the Holy Spirit is also applied to all believers, as is the anointing with the Spirit.

What differs in the matter of the anointing of the Messiah and the anointing of the believer is a matter of degree, of power and authority. The same is true in regard to Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. John prophesied baptism with the Spirit or else with fire, no third alternative. When the time was imminent for Jesus to pour out the promised Holy Spirit he not only told the disciples they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, he also told them that they would receive power in order to be his witnesses (Acts 1:5, 8). Luke also reports that Jesus told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem "until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). While the promise of Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit seems to be broad promise, either baptized with the Spirit or else with fire, the specific promise of power given to the apostles when that began to happen is not broad or general. Somehow, perhaps in reaction to other religious groups, the two promises, one from the prophets regarding the outpouring of the Spirit for "as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39), and one (power, signs) specifically for the chosen witnesses, have become conflated, making John's prediction more difficult to understand than it ought to be.

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Comment:

Jay Graham:

If this were not a "closed" study I probably would not respond due to the potential of confusion to some who do not need to be confused. With this said-- It is my thought Jesus would not need to be immersed by the Holy Spirit. Unlike the apostles, Jesus would already have a "full measure of the Spirit". I do believe the baptism of the Spirit and fire were the same thing that came upon the apostles in Acts 2 (for the Jews) and Cornelius and his household (opening the door for the for the Gentiles). There is also the representation of Judgment by "fire" toward all those who refuse the gospel. Unfortunately this is a serious misunderstanding by those who claim all christians receive this manifestation of the Spirit. it causes them to expect something that is not for them AND to ultimately refuse the true meaning and necessity of immersion.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug Twaddell! Once again an excellent summary of our reading for the day. I'm grateful Christ gave us the example of fulfilling all righteousness (through baptism) & defeating the tempter by quoting scripture. I certainly have verses that I meditate upon during moments of weakness. Philippians 4:8, Romans 12:1-2, & 21.

January 21: Matthew 5-7 (Doug Twaddell)

Matthew chapters 5-7

These chapters give an account of the first extended public teaching of Jesus that we have recorded. As chapter 4 closed, we are told that "great multitudes followed him" wherever He went. He goes to a mountainous area so He can address the entire group.

He begins with some simple explanations of how individuals that are in certain situations or strive for certain mindsets would be blessed. Two of these are simply issues we might find ourselves dealing with. We don't choose to be in mourning or persecuted for righteousness sake. Don't miss the specific designation that the persecution is because of doing things in obedience to God that draw the attention of those that oppose Him. If we suffer for doing wrong, we are reaping what we sowed. The others are characteristics that we should develop in ourselves. Being poor in spirit, having a meek spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart and striving to be a peacemaker are mindsets that we can and should develop.

Jesus then compares us to salt and light. This should help us understand our influence in the world. Like salt influences and enhances the flavor of a meal, we should influence and enhance the world around us for good. Like a light can show how to get to a certain place when it is dark around us, we should show people how to find the truth of Jesus. Also, like a lamp shines a light on an entire room so that those in the house can see what is happening, we should shine a light on the world so that people can see what is going on to make any changes necessary. One of the main ways we shine this light is through our good deeds that we do for others. This light shining is not for our glory, but so that our good works will bring attention to God and His purpose for mankind.

Jesus then assures everyone, perhaps most of all those in positions of religious power and authority at the time, that His purpose is not to destroy the Law of Moses but to fulfill and

complete it. The Old Law will be coming to an end but it should not be a time for despair or concern. Instead, it should be a time of rejoicing and praising God.

Jesus then begins a section that I have always found interesting. I call it the “DO MORE” speech. He systematically goes through some of the major points of the Law of Moses and shows them how they have missed the purpose of the law. He reminds them that they should not murder, but calls them to do more: not even to harbor thoughts about their brother that desire their harm. He also points out that these thoughts can interfere with their ability to worship God. He reminds them that they should not commit adultery, but calls them to do more: not even to have sexual thoughts about a woman that is not their wife. He also points out that this will sometimes require drastic steps to accomplish. He takes note that it was allowed for a man to divorce his wife with a piece of paper, but calls them to do more: to hold marriage up to a higher standard than most men and not divorce except in extreme circumstances. He reminds them that they should not swear falsely, but calls them to do more: not to swear by anything. Those that know us should never have any questions about our promises. He reminds them that the law says you take back what has been taken from you, but calls them to do more: to turn the other cheek, forgive and have mercy on those that wrong you. He reminds them to love their neighbor (what He later calls the second greatest command) and they have been told to hate their enemies, but calls them to do more: to love, do good and pray for their enemies. He reminds them that they should do charitable deeds, but calls them to do more: do it without wondering what you will get in return. He reminds them that they should pray, but calls them to do more: don’t pray so that others acknowledge you. He reminds them that they should fast, but calls them to do more: don’t fast for the sympathy of others. This is all a good lesson for us. We should not be trying to figure out the minimum we need to do to be acceptable. We should strive to do more.

Next he addresses the idea of wealth or riches. He points out what Solomon discovered: you can have all the wealth in the world but it means nothing without God. His first comment on the subject is about where we want our savings account. Do we want earthly wealth that can be gone either in an instant or over the long term or do we want heavenly wealth man can never take away. His second comment is about who we serve. When (not if) we have to make a choice between what is best for our checking account and what is best for our service to God, what will we choose. We cannot (not should not try but cannot) serve both. Yes we can and should use our wealth in our service to Him, but when we can’t do both what will we choose. His final point is that God will take care of our needs if we let Him. When he says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you.” (6:33), He is referring to “these things” that He just talked about: “What shall we eat?” “What shall we drink?” “What shall we wear?” He is not talking about a fancier car, a nicer house or a better job. He is talking about the necessities of life. Paul says, “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” (1 Tim 6:8)

Now He tackles judging. This is something that many of us still struggle with. He does not say we cannot make judgements. He does say we should be cautious about the standard we use to judge. If we judge with the standard God is applying to all of mankind, we are judging righteously. If we judge by a standard that we or another man has set up, we are in danger of administering unrighteous standards and having those same standards applied to us.

He also addresses asking God for things. Again, He is not saying that God is our genie in a bottle. We are not promised that we can have anything our heart desires as long as we ask God. He is talking about the basic needs of life: specifically food. He teaches that God is our Heavenly Father. If we, as imperfect mistake-prone earthly fathers, know how to give our children the things they need; God, the perfect all-knowing Heavenly Father, will obviously know how to give us what we need (not want).

He now gives some shorter lessons. Treat people the way you want them to treat you. The way to heaven is narrow and difficult while the way to hell is wide and easy. Pay attention to the people that are teaching you. Their actions will give them away whether they are true teachers leading to salvation or false teachers leading to damnation.

Finally, He gives what is perhaps the most revealing and intimidating teaching of the whole lesson. There are going to be some that will be surprised at the end of time. They are going to be under the false impression that they are saved, but they are not. He defines those that will be allowed in as those who "do the will of My Father in heaven." He even gives the example of two men: one builds his house in a way that will stand against the foes of water and wind (according to God's standards) and one that ignores those foes to build the way he wants to (according to his own or man's standards). One stands and one falls. We cannot simply build the way we want to. We must build according to the pattern that will stand against our foe.

Those that were listening were astonished at these teachings. Jesus did not beat around the bush or teach to itching ears. He told the truth and was able to speak with authority because of that truth. May those that hear us teach hear the complete, unadulterated, unbiased truth.

Comment:

Diana Ross:

It is a humbling thing to think of these words.

Comment:

Thank you, Doug! I can almost 'hear' you orate these messages!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

As I was reading this today, Ginger brought me a salad and I was reminded that the word "salad" came from "salt" because the Romans would salt vegetables and leafy greens. To be honest I can't think of a great spiritual analogy there.

However, that did make me think of our word "salary" which also comes from "salt" because salt was very valuable and Roman soldiers were actually paid in salt. Perhaps Christians are called salt because they give "value" to the Earth in God's eyes. Perhaps we are "preserving" the world from its final destruction for the time being by keeping the world palatable to God during his long suffering towards it.

Now that I think about if we correlate broccoli and cauliflower with sin perhaps we can make the "salad" analogy work also.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

No, that would be brussel sprouts - the sin that leads to death.

Steven Wright:

I think Doug Twaddell is worth his salt, don't you?

Steven Wright:

Thank you for the fine summaries brother Doug Twaddell!

Charles Fry:

I liked this comment, despite the fact there seemed to be some disparaging of cauliflower, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts. Good eats!

Comment:

Linda Whitworth Davis:

Thank you for the good introduction to today's reading. Very helpful!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Doug Twaddell! I'm so grateful we have these instructions from Christ. Truly, we must do more & go the extra mile. I think Christ's message is summed up well in Matt. 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

January 28: Matthew 8-10 (Doug Twaddell)

Matthew 8-10

Following Jesus' ground breaking and challenging lesson, we are told that "multitudes" followed Him. We know that some wanted to hear his teachings, but many wanted to see healings or other miracles. Matthew now records several of those events.

The first is the healing of a man with leprosy (called Hansen's disease today). In the US it is fairly rare (178 cases in the US in 2015) with most infections worldwide in Africa and South America. It is easily treated today, but in the 1st century it was devastating. God had given provisions for dealing with it that included total separation of the individual from society. Because it is caused by bacteria, the immune system of some people could fight it off. So, God also made provisions for determining if someone was cured from the disease. A man with this disease approaches Jesus and expresses belief in His healing abilities. Jesus actually touches him. This could have been the first physical interaction he had experienced in many years. I am not sure the meaning of this to the man can be completely understood. Jesus then tells him to follow the Law of Moses to be declared cleansed by the priests.

Next, a Roman Centurion comes to Him and expresses his concern for a servant that is paralyzed. First, let's note that this is not a Jew, but a Roman soldier. Second, he is not concerned about himself or a family member but a servant. Either the servant was very valuable, much loved or this is an unusual Roman soldier. When Jesus says He will go to this man's house, the man has an interesting response. He says that he understands having authority because he has others under him and he is confident that Jesus has authority to command those under Him and the servant will be healed. Christ called this great faith. Most were still discussing where this power came from or how it could happen. This Roman understood that Jesus was able to heal because He had authority over these diseases and issues.

Now Jesus comes to Peter's house and finds his mother-in-law ill. He heals her and she is immediately strong enough to serve them. Naturally, many start arriving with people that needed Jesus' healing power. Jesus was able to heal them all and turned no one away.

Jesus then realized that to leave they were going to have to cross the Sea of Galilee. Before He gets in the boat, he answers a couple of would be followers. He reminds us that following Him is difficult and that we have to leave our past behind and look to the future.

Once they get in the boat, a storm comes that threatens their safety. While everyone else is panicking, Jesus is soundly asleep. When they wake Him, He questions their faith because of their fear and orders the storm to stop, which it does. Unlike the Roman soldier earlier, they begin questioning how He could have this authority.

When He encounters a man that is being tormented by a group of demons, He orders them into some hogs which immediately run off a cliff. Interestingly, the people of the area they ask Him to leave, so He gets back in the boat and goes away.

When another man is brought to him who is paralyzed, He first forgives him of his sins. When questions arise about His authority to do that, He points out that it would be easy to say that without any proof. To prove it, he heals his body as well as his soul.

Matthew now recounts his first meeting with the Messiah. Matthew is a Jew that collects taxes for the Roman government. He would have been mistrusted and hated by most Jews. (see my first post about Matthew) Matthew simply leaves his position and follows Christ.

Matthew also talks about an instance when Jesus is sitting with many tax collectors and other sinners. When the Pharisees see it, they question the wisdom of the meeting. Jesus gives His famous reply that the sick have need of a physician. He also instructs the Pharisees to consider the meaning of Hosea 6:6 where God says, "I desire mercy not sacrifice." Would Jesus tell us that we need to consider that meaning as well?

Jesus also has to deal with the Pharisees questioning why His disciples are not fasting. His answer is that they will fast when the time comes, but that time is not yet. Ironically, that time will come when the disciples are under duress from the Pharisees.

On His way to a ruler's house to heal his daughter, a woman with a medical problem touches Christ's robe and is healed. Jesus makes it known that it was not His robe that healed her, it was her faith. When He reaches the ruler's house, he says she is sleeping and simply takes her hand and raises her up.

Two blind men follow Him, calling Him the Son of David, and he tells them that they will be healed according to their faith. They both go away able to see again.

When He casts out another demon so the man effected can speak again, there is disagreement about the source of His authority. While some are trying to figure it out, the Pharisees try to convince them that Jesus is doing this by the power of Satan. It would seem that, through many of these accounts, Matthew is encouraging us to recognize Jesus' authority and properly assign the source. When we can do that accurately, many other questions are answered and many doubts are reassured.

From town to town the same thing happens: masses of people come to him for help and teachings. As He interacts with them, He is "moved with compassion" and calls them "sheep without a shepherd." No doubt this is a condemnation of the Jewish religious leadership of the day.

Even though Matthew only specifically describes his own calling by Christ, he indicates that at this time all twelve are present and designates who they are. These twelve are then sent, by Jesus, to "the lost sheep of Israel." They are not allowed to go to Gentiles or Samaritans. Obviously, this is not because Jesus is ignoring those people or doesn't care about them. These men are simply not equipped or ready for the unique challenges of teaching those groups or for the backlash that will come from the Jews. They are told to take nothing with them, but to give freely of what they have been given; the power to heal and teach. They are

told to evaluate who they are speaking to. If they will listen, stay. But, if they are rejecting the teaching, it is ok to move on. He warns them that they will encounter resistance to the message. No matter what happens, they are to continue on and not give up. They are also supposed to speak the truth and hold nothing back. God will be behind them and they should not fear anything man can do.

In 10:32-33, Jesus gives a teaching that we should all take to heart. If we are willing to speak about Christ to others, Christ will be willing to speak to the Father about us. If we refuse to speak about Him, He will refuse to speak about us. In this, Jesus admits that not all will accept His teachings. Even within families there will be dissention. We have to love Christ above all and be willing to stand against opposition no matter the form or source. We are to resist this opposition through servitude, kindness and mercy.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you Doug Twaddell! A while slew of miracles in this set!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

I agree! Thank you very much!

Comment:

Janet Gordon Gentry:

Thanks, Doug. You did a fine job tying it all together.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thanks, Doug. I liked the comparison of the apostles faith in the boat, and the Roman soldier's faith.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Interesting tricky T-F questions I collected from this reading:

- 1.) Jesus said we are to be like snakes.
- 2.) The most faithful person Jesus found in Israel was a Gentile
- 3.) Jesus and his disciples did not fast.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Action packed chapters! Thanks for the detailed summary, Doug Twaddell! It's so good to study with you. :-) Now that we are studying Isaiah I enjoy looking back on the prophecies. Isaiah 35:5-6 predicts the Messiah would perform signs of healing, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." We witness prophecy coming true in these passages.

February 4: Matthew 11-13 (Doug Twaddell)

Matthew 11-13

When John (the baptizer) has heard about what Jesus is doing from his prison cell, he sends two of his followers to find out if He really is the Messiah of promise. Jesus tells them to tell John about everything they are seeing and hearing. He specifically refers to prophecies from Isaiah (35:5-6 and 61:3) about the sick being healed and the Good News preached to the poor.

As they leave, Jesus addresses the crowd about John. Most, if not all, of them knew who John was and many would have personally heard him teach in the wilderness. Some may have even been baptized by John. He asks them a simple question, "What did you go to the wilderness to see?" Just like today, people could have had differing reasons to check out John. Some went to see him for a side show or a diversion (a reed shaken by the wind). Some went to see if he was really as rough, perhaps in appearance and message, as others said (a man clothed in soft garments). However, some went truly believing that John was a prophet and to hear his message. Jesus assures them that John was a prophet, quoting from Malachi 3:1, calling him a messenger to prepare the way for Messiah.

He then turns His attention to the current generation of Jews. He says they are like children that are never happy with the way others respond. John and Jesus were presenting very different lifestyles. They condemned John for not interacting with society and they condemned Jesus for doing just that. It is dangerous when we argue against something simply to be argumentative. Not only does no good come from it, but those that are paying attention will eventually dismiss everything we say, even if we are right.

Jesus then gives stern rebukes to some of the cities that He has been traveling through. Even though they had seen wondrous miracles meant to confirm His approval by God and given them teachings that carried an authority that they could not explain, they were not repenting of their disobedience.

Jesus offers His famous invitation: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This promise comes with a requirement: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me." The promise of comfort and rest in Christ comes only with my willingness to incorporate His teachings into my life and bear up under the difficulties of living those teachings.

As Jesus and His followers are walking through a field on the Sabbath, they are seen by some Pharisees picking grain and eating it. The Pharisees cry foul and claim they were violating the Sabbath rules. Jesus calls to their attention two facts. First, David and his men ate the showbread from the Tabernacle in violation of the law. However, God seems to have allowed it because they were not immediately struck dead. Second, He points out that the priests, in order to fulfill their duties, must violate the Sabbath laws. I should also point out that I cannot think of anything in the ACTUAL Law of Moses that forbids what they were doing. It would seem this is only a violation of their interpretive extension of those laws. He suggests to them that if they knew the meaning of God's statement, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," (Hosea 6:6) then there would be no issue. Jesus then boldly claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath.

On this same Sabbath, Jesus goes to a synagogue and notices a man whose hand is withered. They ask Jesus a question, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" Jesus points out that all of them would rescue one of their sheep if it was in distress on the Sabbath, so why would it not be good to help a human? He then heals the man.

When Jesus becomes aware of the Pharisees plotting against Him, he leaves to avoid any issues. I want to make note that we are told that Jesus was able to heal everyone that came to Him. Modern "faith healers" will tell you that if they cannot heal you it is your fault because you do not have enough faith. This does not ever seem to be an issue for Jesus or His apostles.

When Jesus casts out a demon from a man, the Pharisees make the claim that He is doing this by the power of Satan. Jesus responds to this by examining the logic of their statement. Why would Satan lessen his grip on humanity voluntarily? If Satan was casting out his own demons, he would be hurting his own cause. However, if Jesus is casting out these demons by the power of God, they better recognize it and fall into agreement. This appears to be what Jesus is referring to when He recognizes a sin called “blasphemy against the Spirit.” The context would indicate that this sin is seeing something that could only have been done by the power of God and attributing that power to Satan. This sin, Jesus says, is not forgivable.

Jesus then explains to us that words have consequences. What we say is a reflection of our hearts. He also tells us that God is going to take all that we say (or type, post, tweet, etc) into account on the day of judgement. We can be forgiven of those things, but that requires us to repent of them and ask God for forgiveness. Again I remind all of us (myself the most) that our words have consequences.

The scribes and Pharisees now proclaim they want to see a sign from Jesus. What have they been seeing already! Jesus calls the sign they will be given “the sign of Jonah.” Like Jonah was in the fish for 3 days and nights, Jesus will be in the earth for 3 days and nights. Nineveh was better than they are because they repented. The queen of the south was better because she honored Solomon’s wisdom. If they don’t get their act together, Jesus tells them that the issues He is trying to help them overcome will return with a vengeance and overtake them completely.

Jesus gives a saying that, for some, is difficult to decipher. On the surface, it would seem that he is denying respect or connection to his family. However, He is not doing that and never did that. He honored his mother in many ways. What He does is emphasize depth of His connection to his followers. This is an allusion to the spiritual adoption by God of those that follow Him.

Jesus now teaches a series of parables. The Greek word *parabole* literally means a placing of one thing by the side of another. Metaphorically it means to compare two ideas, often through a fictitious narrative, to convey a doctrine or precept. This was a favorite teaching method of Christ, because it required a person to think it through and come to a conclusion. God wants His people to be informed and knowledgeable, not unthinking robots.

First, He presents the lesson of the sower. This is a lesson in not prejudging (the sower put seed everywhere), a lesson in not getting discouraged about results and a lesson in guarding our own hearts. Then He gives the lesson of the wheat and tares. We are to understand that good and evil will continue together until all are gathered and separated (judgement day). Next is the lesson of the mustard seed. Even though it is small (the start of the kingdom), it will grow into a great tree (the completion of the kingdom). Now is the lesson of the leaven. Here he uses this analogy to describe the spreading of the Gospel. Remember that later He uses the same illustration to describe the danger of the false teachings of the Pharisees. We also find out that this process of teaching in parables was prophetically described in Psalm 78:2. Now he talks about a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. In both cases, the lesson is that when we find something that has unmeasurable value (the kingdom of heaven) we should be willing to give everything up (our own selfish will) to obtain it. Finally, He gives the lesson of the dragnet. Again, the lesson is that on judgement day good and bad will be separated with the bad being sent to destruction.

When He comes to His own country where He is known as the son of Mary and Joseph, a simple carpenter and they know His brothers and sisters by name, they cannot wrap their minds around where He got all of this information. It should not be surprising that they would have difficulty accepting who He really was. Even though people today never personally knew Jesus as a young boy growing up, many still have trouble accepting who He really was and the wisdom He can offer.

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Thanks brother!

Comment:

Janet Gordon Gentry:

Very good conclusions! Thanks, Doug, for helping me understand these words of Jesus.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

"He will not quarrel or cry out: no one will hear his voice in the streets" - This is one of many passages that pricks my conscience. I confess that this spirit of Christ has not always been the easiest for me to emulate. Along with, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth." Being contentious with the world is vanity. My boys and I have been trying to focus on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control and which one of these tools would be the best to use in various situations that have arisen.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug Twaddell. Another set of chapters packed with important details. I love reading the gospels! It has always seemed mysterious to me when John sent his disciples to ask if Christ was the Messiah. The reason it seems mysterious is because John had witnessed his baptism. John said he may not have known Jesus to be the Messiah had it not been for the sign after His baptism. John 1:32 " Then John gave this testimony: I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." One other thought I have from today's reading is how Matthew stresses the close relationship between faith and miracles. The lack of faith in Jesus' hometown is evidence of this correlation.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

John the Baptist didn't see much of Jesus' ministry. The gospel of John notes that Jesus had begun to preach in Judea before John was arrested (John 3:22-30), but the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicate that overlap was quite short, that "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:14-15, and see Matthew 4:12). So Jesus' ministry had barely begun when John was shut away in the Machaerus Fortress (according to historian Josephus, see Tad Morris's recent evidence post). That Herodian fortress was in modern Jordan, about halfway down the length of the Dead Sea, far from Judea, and even farther from Galilee. All John the prisoner could know was rumors, and reports from his own loyal disciples, who were not necessarily fans of Jesus (that passage in John 3). So John, in his isolation, wanted the straight story. Jesus' answer, rather than testifying of himself, was "tell him what you hear and see."

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Charles Fry. I agree 100%. Excellent historical & geographical lessons on John & Jesus during that time. Thank you! 🙏 I think I just put too much importance on the "sign" of Christ's baptism (proving He was Messiah). I need to concentrate more on the purpose of His baptism fulfilling all righteousness.

February 11: Matthew 14-16 (Marc Hermon)

Today's reading for February 11, 2017
Matthew 14-16

Our thoughts are with Doug and his family today as they look forward to the resurrection.

Matt 14

Herod arrested John because he had rebuked him for taking his brother's wife. After a foolish oath to Herodias' daughter, Herodias conspires to have John beheaded. When Jesus heard of the death of John he at various times throughout the day during this chapter attempts to withdraw to solitary places for prayer. In the evening he feeds 5000+ people and then finally gets some solitary prayer time. Later in the night he walks on water and Peter walks to him until he "took his eyes off Jesus and he began to cry, Save me or I'll perish Lord, help me or I die." Those in the boat see Jesus for who he is, the Son of God!

Matt 15

Jesus converses with the Pharisees and accuses them of considering their man-made traditions more important than God's actual requirements of obedience. Jesus quotes from our reading in Isaiah yesterday that "they worship him in vain". Jesus lists many sins that He considered to be much worse than not washing your hands before dinner. A Gentile woman pleads with Jesus to heal her daughter and Jesus puts her to a test. Her answer is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. In unbelievable humility she throws herself at the mercy of Jesus and says, "even the dogs get to eat crumbs from the Master's table". She captured three amazing ideas in this simple statement. 1.) compared to Jesus we are just beggars, 2.) Jesus is clearly the Master 3.) She felt that the healing of her daughter would be just "crumbs" compared to the ultimate power that she without a doubt understood that he had. Jesus is amazed by her faith. The two people in the Bible that most impressed Jesus with their faith was a Gentile Centurion and a Gentile woman. Jesus this time feeds 4000+ people.

Matt 16

Jesus warns his disciples of the yeast of the Pharisees, and there is (at least to me) a comical section about the disciples thinking he was upset that they didn't bring any bread even though Jesus points out that in the last two chapters he's fed about 10,000 people with bread. Clearly he could provide bread for 13????? Next, we have Peter's confession. Jesus calls him Peter which is a rock (Petros) and says upon this rock (petra-more massive rock) He will build his church. The apostate church thinks this meant that Christ was going to build his church on Peter as the first pope. Some people feel the rock means the confession of Peter. I take it to mean more exactly what it says. That the church would be built on Peter but not Peter only. He was a rock amongst the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the chief cornerstone. Refer to Eph. 2:20. I would point out that 16:19 says the same thing as 18:18 but in ch. 18 it's being said to all of the disciples, not just Peter. Jesus tells his disciples what is about to happen to him and Peter rebukes him. Jesus refers to him as Satan, and thus ends the shortest reign of a pope EVER!!! :) We end the chapter with two verses that have caused confusion for many. There are many theories so I will give you mine. Verse 27 talks about the second coming of the Son of Man at the end of time. Verse 28 talks about the coming of the Son of Man "in his kingdom". Jesus says that the Son of Man coming in his kingdom will happen before many of them will die, giving them something to look forward to very soon. Keep in mind, that Jesus had just been telling the disciples that he would build his kingdom (church) on them as the foundation. So 27 and 28 are two different times. Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27 are the parallel passages but they just say the "kingdom of God come with power", which I think very clearly refers to the church. Keep in mind also, that we started this with Jesus thinking about the

death of John the Baptist who died before seeing the kingdom come. He reassures his disciples that they will see the kingdom and they will be it's foundation.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Marc. I shouldn't be surprised because the Bible is God-breathed but it fascinates me how our studies have woven together thus far. And as you mentioned, our hearts continue to pour out in love to Dale's beloved family. I'm confident there have been times this week Doug has reflected Jesus' need to be in prayer and solitude. I pray he feels deep love from the brethren today and has peace knowing Dale is well pleased with his son. ❤️

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Matthew 7:24-25 (NIV)

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

Jesus had previously used the "petra" word for rock, the big rock.

The same word turns up again in Matthew 27:59-60

59 Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Big rock!

Jesus said that thing, about building on the rock, at Caesarea Philippi, a city built in the shadow of a great rock cliff face on Mt Hermon, one of the three primary sources of the Jordan River. At the foot of the rock, the upper area the city, was a cave with water flowing from it, considered by some to be a sacred place and a gateway to the underworld (Hades). It was and is lush, with verdant growth. There were numerous pagan images arrayed in niches carved into the foot of the rock, a shrine for Pan, and a couple of pagan temples the day Jesus and his disciples had their conversation there. To visit the site now is to see ruins, much of the ancient city flooded as the living water still flows, though no longer from the mouth of the cave but rather pushing out between paving stones of the ancient street. There are scattered building stones and empty niches, and the massive rock stands virtually unchanged since the day Jesus stood there and spoke of building on the rock. The stone the builders rejected, the rock of offense, the bedrock on which the apostles and prophets are grounded and upon which living stones are still added (1 Cor 3, Eph 2:0, 1 Pet 2).

February 18: Matthew 17-19 (Doug Twaddell)

February 18

Matthew 17-19

Jesus now takes Peter, James and John with him to a mountain where He is transfigured and Moses and Elijah appear. The apostles want to honor all three of them with tabernacles. When they see a bright cloud and here the voice of God, Moses and Elijah disappear. God tells them, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (17:5) Even though two other

prominent messengers of God were briefly there, God wants them to listen to His Son. When they ask about the prophesy of Elijah coming first, Jesus informs them that he has already come. In a moment of clarity, they understand He is speaking about John the Baptist.

Someone now comes to Jesus with his son who seems to have epilepsy. He had brought the boy to the disciples, but no one could heal him. Jesus heals him, but the disciples ask why they could not. He tells them it is because of their own unbelief as well as the need for prayer and fasting.

While they are in Galilee, Jesus reminds them that He is going to die at the hands of men. This causes great sorrow. Based on other passages, I do not think the disciples fully understood yet what He was speaking of. However, they are beginning to get a sense that Jesus' life will end at some point.

When they get to Capernaum, they are questioned about the temple tax. Jesus tells Peter to go catch a fish and in its mouth will be the money owed for the tax for Peter and Jesus.

The disciples now begin to question who will be the greatest in the kingdom. I am sure they are thinking about an earthly kingdom. Jesus takes the unusual step of pointing out a child. He tells them that they must become like a little child just to get in. He is speaking about humility. A child is completely trusting, innocent and eager to please. It would appear these are some of the qualities He is referring to. My favorite working definition for humility is "knowing your place." A child, if taught well, knows the parameters of the parent child relationship. If we come to know and understand that we are the created and God is the creator and accept our role and place in that relationship, we are well on our way to understanding humility as God defines it.

Jesus then issues a stern warning to anyone that would lead "these little ones" astray. Again, I think He is continuing the analogy. He is not just talking about physical children, but also those who have adopted the humility He spoke of. If anyone takes advantage of that humility, it will not go well for them. Because of that, Jesus suggests taking drastic steps to keep from sinning or leading others to sin. I do not believe He means to literally cut our hand off or pluck out our eye. However, we may need to take serious steps to protect ourselves and others. Things like controlling, limiting, or allowing monitoring of our internet use. Paying closer attention to the movies and TV shows we watch. Placing stricter limits on the amount time we play video or computer games as well as the kinds of gaming we participate in. These steps would seem radical to some, but what is it worth if it saves our soul?

Jesus then speaks to how far a shepherd (Him/God) would go to save a sheep (us). As he is giving this teaching, I cannot help but assume that His inner thoughts went to the suffering and death he would endure for those sheep.

This leads Him to a discussion about issues between brethren. He offers a simple three step progression to take if a brother has wronged you. First, go talk to him yourself. If you can work it out that way it is best for everyone. If not, then take someone with you. Perhaps in the presence of another they will understand their wrong. As a last resort, bring it before the church. If even then they will not listen, you have done all you can. This seems to be what Jesus is referring to when he tells them that whatever they bind or loose here will be bound or loosed in heaven. If we have issues with a brother here, we should deal with it here and now. If we hold on to unforgiven wrongs they will follow us into eternity. He also points out that when we deal with this (two or three are gathered) He will be present to assist.

Because of this discussion, Peter has a question, "How often should I forgive my brother? Up to seven times?" I am confident that Peter thought this was plenty and he would receive a pat on the back for being so magnanimous. However, Jesus says that is seventy times too few. Now Jesus utters one of my favorite parables. A man owes his master a great deal of money. I believe in today's dollars it would be about \$57,600,000. There is no way this man making minimum wages would ever be able to pay that back. When he begs his master to give him time to pay it (something he could never do) the master completely forgives the debt and lets him walk away. The servant then goes and finds someone that owes him some money. I believe in today's dollars it would be about \$3,200. Even earning a minimum wage it could have been repaid if given time. However, the servant has that man thrown into prison until the

debt is paid. That act made this about revenge not repayment. When the king is told what happened, he has the servant thrown into prison to be tortured every day until his large debt is repaid. The lesson is about forgiveness and is about us. We owe a debt of sin (5.76 million dollars) that we can never repay. The master is willing to forgive us that debt. Because of that mercy, we should be willing to forgive others when they commit small sins (\$3,200) against us. Jesus now leaves Galilee and goes into Judea east of the Jordan. The Pharisees ask him if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Instead of saying "yes" or "no," Jesus quotes scripture to them. He points out that in Genesis 1:27 God made humans "male and female." He also reminds them of Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh." When He comments that man should not pull apart what God has put together, they understand that he did not like divorce. Their next question is, "Why did Moses allow it?" His answer went straight to the heart of the matter. Their hearts were hard and could not accept what God wanted. He then emphasizes that divorce is not part of God's plan, but allows there is sexual immorality it is allowed. Concerned, His disciples comment that it might be better to not marry. Jesus says that some cannot accept that. There are some that are content to not marry and can control themselves in that state. But, there are some that cannot. Being married or unmarried is not a qualification for salvation; being sexually pure is.

Interestingly now, some children are brought to Him. The disciples try to prevent them, but Jesus gets on to them and invites the children in. Apparently they had already forgotten the lesson Jesus taught with the children back in Capernaum of Galilee, so Jesus emphasizes it again.

A man now comes to Him with a question: "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" The implication is that he only has to do one thing. Jesus tells him to "keep the commandments." There were many of those. So the man asks, "Which ones?" Again, he seems to want to know the bare minimum requirement either so he can feel confident or so he doesn't work too hard or give up too much. Jesus gives him a short list of six commands. The man brags, "All these I have kept from my youth." But still asks the question, "What do I still lack?" When Jesus tells him that he must sell what he has and give it to the poor, the man goes away sad because he is unwilling to make that sacrifice. The disciples are concerned because, in their society, it was assumed that great riches meant God was pleased with you. When Jesus points out that it is difficult for a rich man to enter heaven, He is trying to help us understand that it can be difficult for us to give up our own will for God's will. However, with God's help, we can. We should all be asking the question, "What do I still lack?" When we realize the answer, we should make every effort to accomplish it.

Perhaps thinking that they understood what Jesus was saying, Peter asks that since they gave up everything, what will they get in return? Jesus says that they will have the opportunity to sit on twelve thrones with Him and everyone else will also be rewarded for their obedience and faith. He warns, though, that in order to gain these things, we must become a humble servant who yields to the will of God.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

In the story of the two drachma tax at the end of 17 it seems Peter erred in his presumption as he answered the tax collectors. I like the fact that Jesus spoke to him in the house, a bit of chiding, but not overmuch, and not in a way yo embarrass Peter before those others. I think Jesus was cognizant of Peter's feelings. He was certainly concerned about needless offenses when Jesus told Peter how to resolve the problem he had created with his hasty words. "But so that we may not cause offense," Jesus said. Sometimes offense is unavoidable but when it can be honestly avoided it should be. And, somewhat like a thoughtful parent with a child, he told Peter how to fix the problem, and didn't just fix it for him.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thanks brother Doug! I especially appreciated your thoughts on the humility issue of the "Little ones" (that is, to say "godly and therefore humble ones!") All of this, very good! Again thank you! And thank you also Charles!

February 25: Matthew 20-22 (Doug Twaddell)

February 25

Matthew 20-22

Jesus continues the discussion from chapter 19 about what the reward will be of those that follow Him. He tells a parable about a land owner that hires workers at three different points during the day. At the end of the day, they all receive the same amount for their work. Naturally, those that worked all day assumed they would get a bonus. Jesus explains that they are receiving what they agreed to. The lesson is that the reward for following Christ is not up for negotiation. The reward we receive is more than we deserve no matter how long we work or how much we do.

Because their end destination is Jerusalem, Jesus very plainly points out that He will be betrayed, the Jewish leaders will condemn Him to death and the gentiles will mock, scourge and crucify Him. He also tells them that He will rise again on the third day.

The mother of James and John now gets involved. I find it interesting that she is following Jesus, but not surprising that a mother would want to speak up for her children. Her request is that her sons be allowed to have positions of authority in the kingdom of Jesus. Obviously, she is thinking about a physical kingdom. Jesus does not say no. Instead, he asks if they can go through the things that he will go through. They say "Yes," but they do not fully understand what He is talking about. He informs them that they will endure things, but positions in the kingdom are not His to give.

When the others hear this conversation, they were not happy. Jesus again teaches them that it is not important who is the greatest. What is important is who will be the willing servant.

As they are leaving Jericho, two blind men call to Him from the side of the road. The large group with Jesus tries to get them to be quiet, but they just get louder. Jesus has compassion on them and heals them. They now follow Him.

When they get to the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, He tells two people to go into town and find a donkey with its colt and bring them. Jesus rides the donkey into Jerusalem which fulfills a prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. Some of the people give their coats for him to sit on. Others lay down their coats or cut branches from trees for the animals to walk on. As He enters the city, multitudes of people cry praises to Him.

He goes to the Temple and chases off the money changers and those selling doves for sacrifice. While these things were allowed, they were not to be doing that on the Temple grounds. Also, they were apparently taking advantage of the buyers because Jesus calls them thieves. This and the children shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" angers the Jewish leaders. They speak to Him and the inference is that He should tell them to stop. Jesus quotes from Psalm 8 about the young praising Him. He leaves the city to stay in Bethany for the night.

In the morning as they are going back to Jerusalem, He sees a fig tree with no fruit. He pronounces that no fruit will ever grow on it again and it withers. Mark records that they noticed it had withered the next morning. When they are amazed, Jesus tells them that if they have faith, they will be able to do even greater things.

When He arrives at the Temple, the Jewish leaders want to know who gave Him the authority He to do all these things. He says He will tell them if they will answer a question. He asks if the baptism of John was from heaven or from men. This is a question they dare not answer. No

matter how they answer it they are in trouble. Instead of answering they claim they don't know. Jesus refuses to tell them where He gets His authority. However, He does tell them a parable about a man with two sons who asks them to go work in his vineyard. One says "no," but later feels bad and goes to work. The other says "yes," but never does. Jesus wants to know which was obedient. Obviously the first one is and He begins to praise the sinners that are turning to Him and chastise the leaders for being like the second son.

His next parable is even more condemning of the Jewish leadership. He tells of a landowner that left his vineyard in the hands of renters and left. When it came time for him to collect what was his, he sent two waves of servants who the renters beat or killed. He then sends his son to collect and they kill him, too. Jesus asks them what will happen to the renters. They all agree that they will be punished and others will take their place. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23 and tells them that the kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to another nation. When they realized He was talking about them, they want to kill Him. They don't however, because the people believe He is a prophet.

Jesus has another parable for them. This one is about a king that is hosting a wedding for his son. When those that had been invited were called, they refused to come. Some did other things and some killed the messengers. The king then punished those that were invited. He then sent more servants to find anyone from the streets, no matter who they were, that was willing to come. The wedding was filled, but the king noticed one person that did not have the proper garment. The king had him removed from the feast. Jesus closes this parable with the statement, "For many are called, but few are chosen." The lesson for us is that we are those that are called from the streets. Even though we are invited in, we still must prepare ourselves.

After this, the Jewish leadership, who wanted to kill Him earlier, begins looking for ways to trick Him into saying something that will condemn Him. The Pharisees start with a question about whether a Jew should pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus asks them whose image is on the money. Since Caesar's image is on the coins, He tells them to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Now it's the Sadducees turn. They have a complex theoretical question about a woman. She had married a man, but he died before they had any children. According to the law, she married his brother, but he also died with no children. This continued through all seven brothers. They wanted to know whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Jesus tells them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God." These were men that had spent most of their lives studying, memorizing, interpreting and teaching the old law and the history of the Jews. Jesus is saying that even though they could quote it, they did not fully understand or believe it. To prove His point, He quotes from Exodus 3:6 where God places Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the present tense even though they had been dead a long time. The implication is that God is the God of the living; not just those living physically but those living spiritually.

When the Pharisees take their turn, they want to know what the most important commandment is in the Law. Jesus had many to choose from, but He quotes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This is part of what they called the Shema. It was taught to children early and often. It was written down and placed in a box on the doorpost of houses to be touched and quoted when passing it. Jesus says that loving God with every part of your being and life is the most important thing. Without being prompted, He adds that the second most important is to love you neighbor as if they were you. He then points out that all the rest of the Law and Prophets are directly related to these two. If we can accomplish those, we will be willing to do the rest and will know how God wants us to respond to others.

Jesus now has a question for them. Whose son is the Christ? From the prophets, they knew the answer was the son of David. Jesus brings up Psalm 110. In this psalm, known to be written by David and understood to be about the Christ, David calls the Messiah "Lord." When Jesus asks them why David would call his son his Lord, they could not answer Him. This put an end to their questions.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Thank you Doug!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
"Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Just think if the world actually believed this.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thank you, Doug! I especially appreciate you mentioning the passages from Psalm. Every chapter is filled with amazing lessons for us. Love it! I don't feel like I understand the message behind the fig tree withering. I read the following and wondered if it was a good summary? "The fact that Jesus was hungry and approached the fig tree looking for fruit illustrates his identity and authority as the Judge of Israel who finds that the nation, despite its "leafy" appearance, has not produced the fruit God desired."

Replies:

Charles Fry:
I definitely think the fig tree was a purposeful demonstration to the disciples that Jesus has the authority to judge, to condemn as well as to heal. They'd seen him to so many good things, use power to heal, pronounce people forgiven, generally as previously mentioned, being a servant, despite his obvious power and authority. That day with the fig tree they saw he was serious about his warnings of impending judgment.

Ginger Hermon:
Thank you, Charles Fry. Authority was definitely an overarching theme in this chapter. The fig tree being sandwiched between Jesus cleansing of the temple and Jesus teaching in the temple underscores judgement and authority.

March 4: Matthew 23-25 (Doug Twaddell)

March 4, 2017

Matthew 23-25

Jesus now turns His attention fully on the scribes and Pharisees. He starts by pointing out that they are hypocrites. They place tremendous burdens on the behavior of the people, but they are not willing to help. Also, what good works they do are not for the right reasons. All they really want is recognition and praise from men. Jesus tells those following Him not to desire the accolades and honors from men. Instead, strive to serve others.

He follows with a series of specific accusations against the religious leadership. It would be easy for us to read these and agree with Jesus. However, I do not think He is telling us these things simply for informational purposes. I believe we are to look at what they were doing and seriously ask the question, "Does this describe me?" Do we make it so difficult to follow the Bible that no one can live up to our standards? Do we take advantage of the less fortunate to advance our position? Do we work very hard to make a convert and then attempt to conform him to our likeness? Do we put our confidence in our religious activities? Do we get so wrapped up in the details that we forget to love, forgive or show mercy? Are we rotten on the inside even though we keep up a good appearance? Do we believe we are better than others and would not have made the mistakes they made?

As Jesus thinks about the spiritual state that His people are in, He is grieved. He laments that He was willing to shelter and protect them, but they were not willing to accept it. As a result, they are empty and desolate. If we behave the same way they did, we will also be spiritually empty and desolate.

As Jesus is leaving the Temple grounds, He prophesies that one day all of this will be left in ruin. I believe He is not only speaking about the physical Temple, but also the religion of the Law of Moses. This prompts his disciples to ask when and how this will happen. He now makes a series of teachings and predictions about His second coming. First, He says that there will be people that will claim to be Him and people will be deceived by them. Second, He tells us that there will be wars and rumors of wars, but that will not be the end. In fact, even the natural disasters that will strike will only be the beginning. There will also be times when Christians are hated and mistreated by the world. The world will lose its morality and belief. If we are faithful through all of this, we will be rewarded.

24:16-26 seems to be a direct reference to the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in about 70AD. Jesus is warning those that will listen to leave immediately without concern for anything but their lives. I would be interested on hearing discussion of this section. To me He is pointing out what will happen and emphasizing that this is not His second coming. Even though there will be those that say He has returned; He has not. Starting with verse 27, He begins to explain what will happen at the end of time. It will come so quickly that it will be over before we realize it. Christ will appear in the clouds with power and glory. At the sound of the trumpet, those that are His will be gathered to Him.

Jesus tells them to watch the signs, but He also tells them that no one can know exactly when it will happen. He uses Noah as an example. Even though the people were warned, everyone was going about their normal routines and then suddenly everything changed. That is how the end will come. Perhaps one of the most misunderstood passages is 24:40-41. The word that is translated "left" is often associated with the concept of "left behind." A more accurate association would be "left out." The word means to send away, to give up a thing. One will be accepted and one left out. One will be admitted and one sent away. His point is to always be ready, because the end will come without warning leaving no time to repent. The faithful servant is always doing the will of his master. The servant that goofs off thinking the master is not there will be caught off guard and punished for his disobedience.

Jesus tells two parables. The first is about a wedding party that is waiting on the groom to arrive. Five of them bring extra oil for their lamps in case he is late. Five do not come prepared. When they have to leave to find more oil, the groom arrives and the wedding goes on without them. Again, they are left out.

The second parable is about a man that gives various amounts of money to three servants and leaves. Two of the servants use the money given them to make more. In fact, they double their money. The servant that received the least amount does nothing with his. When the master

returns, he is very pleased with the first two and angry with the third. He calls him a wicked and lazy servant. Again, that servant is kicked out of the presence of the master. These parables are to emphasize Jesus' previous teaching. We are to always be ready for the return of Christ and to do as much as we can to be busy and fruitful with what God gives us.

To point out why that is important, Jesus gives a graphic rendition of the final judgement. He talks about humanity being divided into two groups. This division is based on the actions they took toward those around them. I do not believe this is meant to be a checklist for the faithful. It is meant to emphasize the importance of our individual actions and our interactions with others. When we see those less fortunate than ourselves, we should do what we can. Whether it is some food, a drink, shelter, clothing or a visit, anything we do and everything we do matters. I am reminded of Galatians 6:9-10, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." In the description from Revelation 20 of the judgement before the throne of God, we are told twice that we will be judged "according to our works." (vs 12, 13)

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Very good! Thank you brother Doug!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Yes, many people use 40 & 41 to talk about the rapture and the "left behind" concept. The problem is the comparison to verse 39 where it talks about the ones that were "left behind". They received immediate and swift destruction. The Left Behind Series is a wicked form of false teaching promising second chances that God never promised. As Jesus, himself said in John 5 28-29, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out-those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

Remember Lot's wife! Swift destruction.

Comment:

Bryan Bown:

thx Marc for pointing out v39 with 40&41 the ones who didnt beleive the flood was coming did not receive a second chance.I believe Jesus would have explained the differance between them if it was so

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug! Great Lesson!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

The disciples in their question it seems presume that the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of Christ are the same event. Jesus talks about both events and differentiates between

the two as one taking place at a time prophesied by Daniel and one happening at a time that even He did not know.

Chapter 24 has always been a challenging passage because of how it seems to jump back and forth between the two questions. I like to divide the chapter into two chapters: (Ch 24A vs. 1-31) and (Ch 24B vs 32-51)

Ch 24A Verses 1-29 refer to the persecution of the Jews and culmination in the destruction of Jerusalem in vs. 29 using the same language as the destruction of Babylon, Edom and Egypt among others in the Old Testament. In verse 27 there is a mention of the second coming of Christ but only as a comparison that it would be way more obvious of an event so don't believe the false christs (vultures) who will be preying on people during this current event. Verses 30-31 then discusses a later event of the second coming. Ch 24A gives us much detail about the destruction of Jerusalem and a little about the second coming.

Ch 24B is a mirror image of Ch 24A. It again starts with the destruction of Jerusalem and ends with the second coming of Jesus but this time most of the emphasis is on the second coming. Verses 32-35 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem again and says that when you see the things mentioned in the first part of Ch24A you know it is about to happen. There is a warning that the destruction of Jerusalem was imminent within their generation. Verses 36-51 again talks about the second coming that will come swiftly on both the righteous and the unrighteous and even the Son (at least at that time) did not know when that day would be.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Doug Twaddell! Excellent summary & thoughts behind these 3 chapters. There is SO much to deeply consider. We must keep Christ's return on the forefront of our mind and always be ready!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

I appreciate the vivid examples Jesus references in chapter 23: phylacteries, blind guides, straining gnats but swallowing camels, cleaning outside of cups but not inside, whitewashed tombs, snakes, brood of vipers, hen gathering chicks under her wings.

March 11: Matthew 26-28 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for March 11

Matthew 26-28

This final section of Matthews' account begins with the Jewish religious leadership going into council to plan on killing Jesus. Their only concern seems to be how the people will react. Meanwhile, in Bethany, Jesus is at the house of Simon the leper. This is where Mary (she is named in John 12) anoints Jesus with oil. Jesus refers to it as a preparation for His burial. Also, Judas agrees to betray Christ.

Jesus gives His disciples instructions about where to prepare the Passover. During the meal, Jesus points out that someone will betray Him. Speculation begins about who it might be. Jesus cryptically indicates who it might be based on dipping some bread in herbed oil. When Judas follows the others by asking if it is him, Jesus plainly says it is.

Next, Jesus gives instruction on how to remember Him. The unleavened bread used for Passover is to represent His body and the wine is to represent His blood that brings in the new Covenant. This becomes the Lord's Supper or Communion remembrance for the church as instructed by the Apostles.

After the meal, they walk to the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem. Along the way, Jesus explains that all of those with Him will stumble. They are going to fall to temptation and fear. Peter is insistent that he will not even in the face of death. However, Jesus gives him a reference point, the rooster crowing, so that he will remember their conversation.

Now, Jesus moves away, taking only Peter, James and John with Him, to pray. He then goes a little farther alone. His prayer shows how much the prospect of suffering and dying is weighing on Him. He emphasizes how important it is to Him that the will of the Father be accomplished, no matter what. When He returns to the three with Him, they are asleep. He wakes them up and then moves away to pray more. They fall asleep again and He lets them be. When He returns the third time, He wakes them and announces that it is time for the betrayal.

Judas approaches with an armed mob who, when he greets and kisses Jesus, arrest Him. Peter (named in John 18) tries to take matters into his own hands with a sword which draws a stern rebuke from Jesus. Jesus points out that He is allowing this to happen because it is part of the Father's plan according to prophecy.

He is taken to the High Priest where two false witnesses are found to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. They also spit on Him, beat Him and ridicule Him.

Outside this event, Peter is standing among the crowds. This is where he is asked three times about his connection to Jesus and three times denies it. Immediately after the third time, the rooster crows and Peter is crushed by his failure.

The next morning they take Jesus to Pilate, the governor. When Judas realizes what is happening and his role in it, he is crushed by his failure. He returns the money and commits suicide. The reactions of Peter and Judas are striking in their difference. Peter, while disappointed, does not allow his sin to destroy him. He repents and seeks forgiveness. Judas allows his sorrow to define him. He gives up seeing no hope. When, not if, we fail Christ, what matters the most is our reaction to it. We can repent in sorrow and seek forgiveness moving forward or we can give up by losing sight of our hope and the forgiving power of God through Christ.

Pilate is frustrated by Christ. Even though Jesus may have committed blasphemy in the eyes of the Jews, it is not worthy of a death sentence in a Roman court. He attempts to gain Christ's freedom by offering to release Him in a traditional gesture of mercy during the feast. The crowd will have no part of it and actively calls for His crucifixion. Jesus is then whipped and humiliated by dressing Him in a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns. The soldiers pretend to bow and worship Him as they, too, spit on and beat Him. Then they put His own clothes back on Him and start the walk to His death. When Jesus cannot physically carry the crossbeam any longer, they pick Simon from Cyrene out of the crowd to do it.

When they get to Golgotha, they crucify Him with two others who were thieves. Another prophecy is fulfilled when some cast lots for his clothes. When they announce His crime with a sign over his head, they write, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." For the six hours He is on the cross, the crowd, soldiers and two thieves mock and revile Him.

Matthew only records one thing said by Jesus from the cross. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me." Jesus is expressing how alone He feels as He carries the weight of the sins of the world on top of all of the physical suffering.

When Jesus dies, several things happen that could not have been kept quiet. There is an earthquake and mass resurrection of the dead. The veil in the Temple is torn from the top to the bottom. I have always wondered what the priests in the holy place thought when they could suddenly see into the Holy of Holies and did not die? I have also wondered who fixed the veil? This above all should have been a sign to the priests. All of these things even caused one of the Roman Centurions on hand to proclaim, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Jesus, who had no home or possessions, was buried in the tomb of a rich man which Pilate sealed and guarded at the request of the Jews. They were concerned that Jesus' followers would steal the body and then claim that He had risen from the dead. It is interesting because this proves that they were listening to His teachings and claims. Despite their efforts, Jesus did come out of the tomb. The grave was empty as He appeared to people in person. Even the Jewish religious leaders were forced to bribe the soldiers because they could not honestly dispute what had happened.

Jesus then gives some final instructions. He confirms the authority that has been given to Him. He confirms that baptism is the method of converting disciples. He confirms that our actions are important in being obedient to His commands.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Interesting, how the Jewish leaders hear the words spoken by them to Judas (upon his remorse), returning to them from the mouth of Pilate (as they felt no remorse), "See ye to it!" Also: The "dipping sauce" (sop), that Jesus was dipping the "Lechem oni" (Bread of affliction) into, was called "Charoset." It was made out of fruit, Garbanzo beans (Chick peas), olive oil, Tahini (Sesame seed paste), and seasonings. A progenitor of today's Hummus. It was to represent the mortar used in the laying of the bricks, when the Jews were slaves in Egypt. They would also dip the "Bitter herbs" into this mixture.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Doug: Thanks for your devotion in sharing the gospel every Saturday! What an incredible blessing it is to study together. And a great joy to read everyone's perspective and insight. After weekly readings in the subject of prophecy and reading Isaiah 53 last night, I have a greater appreciation for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Today my heart was pierced over and over as I deeply pondered Jesus' soul being overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He had at his disposal 12 legions of angels but because His unwavering love He fulfilled all prophecy. Praise Him! <3

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Two more quick things... #1) I've always had it in my mind that Judas withdrew from the upper room prior to Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper. Is that accurate? #2) I believe the hymns the Lord and disciples sang between the Passover and Mount of Olives were from Psalm 115-118. I encourage everyone to read those passages as well.

Replies:

Charles Fry:

It seems that Judas was there for the beginning of the meal and the foot washing, as reported in John 13, and the resumption of the meal, also in John, with the conversation about the betrayer, mentioned also by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and then he left. In Luke's record we have Jesus instituting the New Covenant ceremony before the comments about the betrayer, with those comments being in the context of his imminent death, Luke 22:20-23. Judas must have been there for the foot washing and the institution of the memorial, before he went out to do as Jesus said he would. This is an account of a hard heart and the deceitfulness of sin.

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks for the clearing that up for me, Charles!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

When He utters, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" it was meant to open the eyes of the Jews that knew their scripture since what he was doing was quoting the first verse of David's prophecy of the Messiah in Psalm 22 which we studied a few weeks ago. He was proclaiming from the cross that prophecy was being fulfilled before their very eyes! This would bring to mind the other parts of that Psalm.

vs. 6-7 "scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue Him. Let him deliver him since he delights in him."

vs 14 "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint"

vs.15 "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death."

vs 16 "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet"

vs. 17 "I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

vs. 18 "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing"

vs. 24 Jesus is not questioning his Father. He has total confidence. "For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help."

and finally Psalm 22 concludes with...vs 31

"They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn --FOR HE HAS DONE IT!" (It is Finished!)

Comment:

Denise Waits:

I've always wondered why there aren't any other historical accounts of those who were raised from the dead following Jesus' death. Thoughts?

Replies:

Charles Fry:

There is no definite answer to the question, beyond another question, "Why should we expect any other historical account of that event?" We don't know how many, we don't know how long dead, we don't know who, except that they were holy people. We don't know whether they were taken up to heaven, or died again like Lazarus. (Though I think they did die again.) We do have some apparent external reference to the darkness and the earthquake, but not in a religious context. Any such references are remarkable given the minimal historical documents we have from that period of time outside of the NT itself. The manner of Matthew's mention suggests there were people still alive who could corroborate the story, as also with the torn veil of the temple, the darkness, the earthquake. Including such details in his report would be absurd if there were people still alive who could say, "I was there, that never happened," and if no affirmation possible among people who lived through the events referenced.

Keith Owens:

Just some late night musings from someone who cannot sleep thus far tonight. I have always appreciated that those raised went into the city, and we are told of that. In turn, that causes one to wonder why those raised went into the city and what difference it makes. If none were recognized, then it would prove nothing, symbolize nothing, and mean nothing to anyone who saw them. To me, that would seem inconsistent with so many details given to fulfill the many prophecies surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection, particularly when we are told they went into the city when the Lord arose. If, however, they were recognized, they take on some significance because if they were raised then the reports of Jesus' raising would be easier for the saints to accept. This event also points to something fundamentally changing in the way death relates to the believer. Remember, it is specified that they were the righteous dead. They were where Jesus had been, and now they have returned with Him. A foreshadowing of 1Thess 4, where we are told that Jesus will bring with Him the righteous dead who will then be raised, and we who are alive will be changed to meet them and the Lord in the air, for all eternity. I could certainly be wrong, but for me those holy ones point to the hope that we all share... the hope of a resurrection enabling us to be with the Lord just as those holy ones raised with the Lord. I'll stop there for I do not wish to write a book at this late hour.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Regarding what was on the table in a first century a.d. temple era Passover meal, we can be sure there was unleavened bread, either wheat or barley, and a roasted lamb with bitter herbs. Those things were prescribed. We know from the gospels there were cups and "fruit of the vine" to drink as well. Other than that, we don't know, because we have no contemporary accounts except the gospels. Exactly what their bitter herbs were, we don't know. It is reasonable to guess that the dip on the table may have been what Doug mentioned, or maybe what Steven suggested, though the latter is a harder inference, in my opinion. Many commentators assume that one can look at the Talmud or the symbolic Passover Seder practiced by Jews, but these sources are much later than the temple era and do not give us a picture of the ancient Passover meal. For a long time after the destruction of the temple the Jews did not observe the Passover, which was a pilgrimage feast. Eventually the rabbis concluded they needed a symbolic observance, and invented symbolic rituals for the diaspora. Roasted lamb is not on the table for a Passover Seder. The Passover lamb and supper are symbolically remembered in the traditions of the Seder, but not duplicated. There really is no way to correlate the items on the Seder table with the temple era meal, except in terms of prescribed symbolism. No one has the information available to reconstruct the actual Passover meal and customs, beyond the basics mentioned in the Bible, from any source currently

available. Josephus and Philo are no help here, writing only about the temple aspect of the Passover sacrifice, not the meals of the pilgrims.

March 18: Mark 1-2 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for March 18

Mark 1-2

Even though Mark never names himself, he was consistently given credit for this book by the early church writers. Mark's mother owned a house in Jerusalem large enough for the church to meet (Acts 12:12). Peter may have been a regular visitor, based on a servant girl recognizing his voice through a door, and called Mark his son (1 Peter 5:13). This common phrase may indicate that Peter baptized him. Mark's cousin was Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), which may be why he was invited to go with Paul on his first journey. Because Mark returned home before the trip was barely started, Paul did not want to take him on the next one. Barnabas lobbied for his cousin, but Paul was unmoved. Paul took Silas and Barnabas took Mark as they went in different directions (Acts 16:36-41). However, Mark appears to be with Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome (Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24). Paul also sends specifically for Mark toward the end of his life calling him "useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). This would indicate that Mark had regained Paul's trust and that Timothy knew him as well.

Mark begins his account with quotations from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 which speak about someone preparing the way for the Messiah. He then gives a description of John and his work, including the baptism of Christ, followed by a very brief account of Satan tempting Christ in the wilderness. Mark does not spend any time discussing Jesus birth or early years. Instead, he seems determined to get right to the work of the Messiah including an account of Peter, Andrew, James and John being called by Him.

Mark describes those at Capernaum being astonished at the authority he seemed to hold when he taught. When he casts an unclean spirit out of a man (even seeming to have a conversation with the spirit itself) they are amazed and His fame begins to spread.

Upon entering the house of Simon (Peter), whose mother-in-law was ill, He heals her. The next thing you know the whole city is bringing their sick and afflicted to Him to be healed. In the morning, well before daylight, he goes off by himself to pray. They finally find Him, indicating that the town is looking for Him, and he announces that they are leaving to go to other cities. This takes Him all through the area of Galilee.

Jesus encounters a man with leprosy. When the man expresses his confidence in Jesus ability to heal him, Jesus does. He tells the man not to tell anyone. I am not sure how someone cured of leprosy could go unnoticed, but it doesn't matter. The man tells anyone within earshot what happened. Now Jesus cannot openly go into a city because of the crowds He is gathering. Instead, He stays outside of the cities and the people come to Him from everywhere.

When He goes back to Capernaum, the crowds grow very large around the house He was in. When the friends of a lame man cannot get through the door, they open an area of the roof and lower him in by ropes. Jesus tells him that his sins are forgiven. The scribes that are there began thinking that only God can forgive sins. Without them saying a word out loud, Jesus addresses their contemplation. He comments that it would be easy for Him to say the man's sins are forgiven. How could you prove that? So, to show them His power, He heals the man of his physical issues.

When He leaves the city to go to the Sea of Galilee, many follow Him. He sees Matthew (Levi) collecting taxes and tells him to follow and he does. When He has supper at Matthew's house, there are many other tax collectors there. These may have been Matthews's friends and co-workers because no self-respecting Jew would have ever entered a tax collectors house to eat. When the Jewish religious leadership questions this, Jesus tells them that it is the sick that need a doctor. Those that sin need repentance.

When Jesus is asked about why His disciples are not fasting like the followers of John and the followers of the Pharisees, he has an interesting statement. He says that the friends of the bridegroom don't fast while the bridegroom is present. The main comment I will make is to note is that Jesus is referring to Himself as the Bridegroom. The church is not established yet, but Jesus is already laying the foundation of the marriage described in Revelation given to John.

As Jesus and his followers are walking through a field of grain on the Sabbath, they pick some of the grain. The Pharisees are appalled and claim they are violating the Law of Moses. Jesus points out that David and his men ate the showbread that was only for the priests, when they were desperately hungry, without penalty. He points out that the Sabbath was made for man. It was put in place to help and teach man. Instead, the Pharisees had put so many restrictions in place that it seemed like man was a servant to the Sabbath.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! I especially appreciated the history you wrote in the first paragraph. It's good for us to make these connections, see the big picture, and not just think about the chapters assigned. A few comments... 1.) I think it's fascinating that Mark begins the book with the prophecy of Isaiah. Truly, John the Baptist played a significant role in preparing the way for Jesus. Through him all men might believe in Jesus (John 1:7). What John the Baptist testified was true: John 10:41, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man (Jesus) was true." 2.) Mark mentions Jesus was with the wild animals in the desert. I think he's the only gospel writer who reports their presence. It's interesting and helps emphasize God kept Jesus safe during these 40 days.

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

Also, to confirm, Mark is the first gospel that was written, correct?

March 25: Mark 3-4 (Doug Twaddell)

March 25, 2017 Reading

Mark 3-4

After picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus goes to a Synagogue and sees a man with a withered hand. He knows that the Pharisees are watching closely, so He asks them if you should do good or evil on the Sabbath and proceeded to heal the man.

The Pharisees begin trying to figure out how to get rid of Jesus. He leaves Jerusalem and goes to Galilee. People begin arriving from all over. He has His disciples make sure that a boat is ready for them to use if the crowds put them in danger because of their desire to get close to Him.

Jesus hand selects the 12 apostles from His disciples. His plan is to send them out to preach with the power to heal and cast out demons. He gave them this power so they would have proof that their message was from God.

The crowds become so overwhelming that they cannot go about daily tasks, like eating. When those that knew Him when He was younger hear what is going on, they try to get ahold of Him because they think He is crazy.

The scribes try to claim that He is doing all these things because He is serving Satan. Jesus gathers them to discuss this accusation. He points out that it is not logical that Satan would work against himself. If Satan was doing that, he would be defeating his own purpose and building up his enemy. Jesus then makes a very strong accusation against them. He tells them that they are committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and that it will not be forgiven. This particular sin seems to only be possible when someone has evidence that something has happened by the power of God but attributes it to Satan. We know from other passages that many of the Jewish religious leaders believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but did not voice that belief openly because of fear. It is definitely possible that some of these men recognized the power of God, but tried to mislead the people by convincing them that it was from Satan.

When Jesus' mother, Mary, and His brothers arrive, everyone points out to Him that they are here. They may have been among those that were trying to escort Him away because they questioned His sanity. Instead of acknowledging their relationship, He points out that His family is anyone who does the will of God. It is worth noting that Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, is not mentioned. It may be that he simply does not come, but the omission of Him in other accounts during this part of Jesus' life would indicate that Joseph had died.

Jesus now gets into the boat so He can teach those that are along the shore. He tells them the parable of the sower. Not understanding this teaching, the apostles ask Him about the meaning. He points out that the Word of God touches many different hearts. Some are not receptive at all. Others are receptive, but they either loose interest or the distractions of the world get in the way. However, some hearts are receptive and the word grows to produce fruit.

He also tells them the parable of the lamp. It does no good to light the lamp and then cover it up. It should be put on a pedestal to give maximum coverage for the light. He uses this opportunity to warn that we should be careful how we judge others. Whatever standard we use, we should be willing to judge ourselves by.

Jesus also points out that the kingdom of God grows even though we might not completely understand how. He compares it to a farmer that plants the crop, but does not control the growth. The farmer simply cares for and watches the crop until it is time for the harvest. We, too, cannot control the growth of the church. We can simply plant, care for and watch with the knowledge that one day there will be a harvest. He also compares it to a mustard seed. It may start off small and humble, but it grows into a mighty plant.

Jesus decides they need to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They are spread out among several boats. While they are crossing, a storm forms. While everyone else is panicking as they fear for their lives, Jesus is asleep. They wake Him up while asking, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" What a question to ask Jesus, especially after all the miracles they had personally witnessed. Jesus simply stands up and says, "Peace, be still!" Amazingly, the storm, even the wind, completely and totally stops. Jesus connects their fear to a lack of faith. If they had faith in the power of Christ, which they had seen with their own eyes, they would not have been afraid at all.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
Mark 3:25 "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." (Not only today's Bible reading but also summative statement of this week in politics. :)

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
Politics is a house that I cannot stand.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! I can hear your voice as I read each Saturday's gospel summary. It's a great encouragement. <3 A few things that triggered my thoughts... The crowds became so overwhelming. This is an important statement! Even non-Christian contemporary writers give this description for Jesus (multitude of followers). This provides evidence! Another thing that really hit me was thinking of Jesus quoting Isaiah. As mentioned last night, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies in Isaiah exactly. Finally, last thing I'll mention is only Mark records the parable in 4:26-29. I appreciated your thoughts on this. The mysterious power of the seed - The Word - is emphasized. While we, God's Kingdom, may be oblivious to how God makes the seed grow, we are called to lead people to repentance and obedience to God. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) As well, we are called to be reapers in God's harvest. "Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" (Matthew 9:37-38)

Comment:

Charles Fry:
A theme Mark highlights more than the other gospels is the weakness, slowness, failures of the disciples. Perhaps Mark's own less than stellar early experience as a helper to Barnabas and Saul sharpened his insight into understanding that all disciples need to know that even Jesus chosen ones had such problems.

Mark 4:39-41 (NIV)

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Notice the fear wasn't over when the squall ended. Notice the very strong word, "terrified" and that this was said after the weather was stilled. Terrified of Jesus?

April 1: Mark 5-6 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for April 1, 2017

Mark 5-6

This chapter begins with an account of a man that was tormented by an evil spirit. The community had decided to chain him up, but he was able to break the bindings and was now living in a graveyard. When Jesus approaches him, the spirit begs Jesus not to bother him. Jesus commands him to leave the man and also asks the spirit's name. The spirit calls himself "Legion, for we are many." The spirits ask to be sent into a herd of swine. I find it interesting that a herd of swine could be found in Israel. The swine then run off a cliff into the sea and drown. Naturally, those taking care of the sheep run and tell everyone. When they return, the previously uncontrollable man is clothed, calm and acting normally. They beg Jesus to leave the area. The man wants to go with Jesus, but Jesus tells him to go proclaim what has happened to anyone that will listen.

When they return to the other side of the sea, a great many people gather. Jairus, one of the rulers of the local synagogue, pleads with Jesus to help his daughter who is dying. This would have taken great courage. This man is likely to have been in on various efforts to find a way to silence Jesus. But now, when there is no hope, he turns to Christ for help.

On the way to Jairus' home, a woman is in the crowd that has had a bleeding problem for 12 years. She is convinced that if she can just touch Jesus' clothes she can be healed. She finally gets close enough to touch Him and immediately she is healed. Jesus also knows immediately what has happened. When she realizes that she is found out, she is scared. Jesus does not scold her, but praises her for her faith.

While Jesus is still talking to her, a servant of Jairus arrives to tell him that his daughter is dead. Jesus tells Jairus not to be afraid. When they get to his house, Jesus goes in with only Peter, James and John. He tells the family and friends that are mourning that she is only sleeping. They don't believe Him, so He makes them all leave. Jesus takes the girl's hand and tells her to get up. She immediately comes back to life.

When Jesus leaves he goes back to the area of Nazareth. On the Sabbath Day, He is teaching in the synagogue. Those listening cannot understand how the carpenter's son they knew could have come by the education Jesus seems to possess. Instead of being interested in the information, they reject Him. Jesus comments that a prophet is often rejected by those that know him. It is even true today that people often have to overcome their background with those that knew them when they were younger.

Jesus leaves that area and sends the apostles out in groups of two. They are only allowed to take the clothes on their back. They are told that some will not receive them, but instructed that God will deal with them at the judgement. As they preach repentance, they also cast out demons and heal.

When King Herod hears about the amazing things that Jesus is doing, he is concerned. Even though there is disagreement about whom Jesus is, Herod is convinced that He is John the Baptist back from the dead. Herod knew that he had killed John the Baptist. When Herod had married his brother's wife, Herodias, John had been outspoken against it. Herod had John imprisoned, but Herodias was not satisfied with that. At a feast, Herod's daughter entertained

them and Herod was so pleased he told her he would give her anything up to half his kingdom. As per her mother's suggestion, she asked for the head of John the Baptist. Even though he did not want to do that, he consented and instructed that John would be beheaded. The disciples gave John's body a proper burial.

When the apostles return from their travels, they are excited to share with Jesus all their experiences. Jesus encourages them to go to a deserted place by themselves to rest. Apparently, they had not even taken much time to care for their basic needs, like eating, because they were so busy.

When they leave in a boat, the crowds see them going and rush to meet them when they land. Jesus sees all of the people and has compassion on them. He begins to teach them. As the day is coming to a close, the disciples are concerned about the crowd. There is no food where they are at and it will take some time to get back to the city. Jesus tells them to give them something to eat. The disciples are now concerned because they do not have enough money to buy all the food that would be needed. Jesus asks them what they have on hand. All they have is five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus has the crowd sit in groups. He then blessed the food and begins dividing it up. Before too long, everyone is full and there are twelve baskets of leftovers. With two loaves and five fish, Jesus had fed over 5000 people and ended up with much more than He started.

Now Jesus has the Apostles travel by boat to Bethsaida while He sends the crowds away and spends time alone to pray. About evening, the boat is in the middle of the sea and is in trouble. A storm is making difficult for them to make any headway. About 3am, Jesus comes walking on the water toward them. Thinking it is a ghost, they panic. Jesus assures them that it is Him. The wind immediately stops when He steps into the boat. This amazes them. It is beyond their understanding. Mark records that they also had not understood what happened with the loaves and fishes because their hearts were hardened.

When they land at Gennesaret, they are recognized right away. Everyone begins to bring anyone they know that is sick or handicapped. Everywhere they go, crowds follow just so they can touch his clothes and be healed. Mark points out that everyone that touched His clothes was healed. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that, later on, people are trying to get ahold of Paul's handkerchief thinking they will be healed by touching it.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Jesus: The Great Physician! I marvel over these miracles. Yet nothing compares to His ability to heal us from all sin. Thank you, Doug Twaddell I love these testimonies.

April 8: Mark 7-8 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 4-8-17

Mark 7-8

The Pharisees notice that some of Jesus' disciples did not follow the established ritual for washing their hands before they ate. This was not a part of the Law, just a tradition of the Jewish leadership. When they ask Jesus about it, He references Isaiah 29:13. He points out that the people are treating the traditions of men as if they were commands of God. By doing this, they are worshiping in vain. He is not saying that traditions are innately wrong. His concern is that the traditions are considered a higher authority than God's direct commands.

He points to one example. The law said that children should care for their parents. In opposition to that law, it had become a tradition that the children could tell their parents that the money they had to give to them had been promised to the Temple. This tradition allowed a loophole to avoid the commandment. Jesus indicates that they had set up many such traditions.

Apparently referring back to the original accusation of not participating in a traditional hand washing, Jesus tells the crowd it is what comes out of a man that defiles him, not what goes into him. His disciples ask for clarification as they go into a house. Jesus reminds them that when evil comes out of a person, whether in words or actions, it is a reflection of the person's heart. These are the things that defile a person, not the things they eat. This would have been shocking for a Jew to hear because of their high regard for the dietary laws and traditions that had intensified those restrictions.

When Jesus travels to the area of Tyre and Sidon, He would like to be incognito. That becomes impossible. A gentile woman comes to Him asking for help for her daughter who had a demon. Jesus comments on whether He should give to dogs (Gentiles) what was intended for children (Jews). She responds that even dogs are allowed to eat the crumbs that the children drop. This is an interesting viewpoint of some of the Jews tepid reaction (or outright rejection) of Christ. She may not know it, but she is alluding to something that God will say later when He tells the Jews that He will give the kingdom to the Gentiles. Jesus immediately removes the demon from the girl.

Now He travels to the Sea of Galilee where a man is brought to Him who is deaf and has a speech impediment. Jesus puts His fingers in the man's ears and touches His tongue and the man is healed. Jesus tells them not to tell anyone, but how do you hide this? In fact, the more Jesus asks them to keep it quiet, the more it is spread. That is human nature, isn't it? All this time His fame and popularity expands.

Again, the crowds become enormous. Jesus again becomes concerned about their ability to have food. He approaches his disciples to find out how much food they have. They only have seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. Just like before, Jesus has the people sit down while he blesses the food. After everyone is full, they collect seven baskets of leftovers. This time He had fed about 4,000 people. Jesus and his disciples leave in a boat to the area of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees start arguing with Him asking for a sign. Jesus becomes frustrated. First, He asks them why they are looking for a sign. What do they think Jesus has been doing all this time? Second, He tells them that they will not be given a sign. Jesus is pointing out that signs have been given and they are ignoring them. If they cannot recognize Him from the signs He is doing, they would not accept any sign.

When they get into the boat again, we are told that no one had brought any bread with them. Jesus uses this as a teachable moment to point out that the leaven (influence) of the Pharisees and Herod can spread and should be guarded against. The disciples start wondering if Jesus is referring to the fact that they did not bring any bread. Jesus becomes frustrated at their lack of understanding. He reminds them of the time He fed 5,000 with only five loaves and when He fed 4,000 with seven loaves. He asks them to remember how much was left over. Jesus wanted them to connect the dots. He wanted them to realize that, under the right conditions, a little can go a long way. If left unchecked, false doctrine and evil can negatively impact many people. With God's help, the smallest amount of good, though it seems insignificant, can have a positive impact on many people.

When Jesus arrives in Bethsaida, a blind man is brought to Him. He leads the man out of town, spits in his eyes and touches him to heal him. Jesus then asks if he can see anything. The man describes men looking like trees and walking around. Jesus puts His hands on the man's eyes again and the man can see perfectly clearly. Again, Jesus instructs the man not to go back to town and not to tell anyone. How can you hide a former blind man that can now see?

Jesus and His disciples now travel to Caesarea Philippi. On the way, He asks what rumors they hear about who He is. They answer John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets or there are other ideas. Jesus asks them who they think He is. Peter says that He is the Christ. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them about what He will have to suffer and that He will die and rise again three days later. Peter takes exception to this idea and pulls Jesus aside to discuss it. Jesus becomes very stern with Peter. He says, "Get behind me Satan." This is an indication that Peter is not thinking about what God's will is but what his own desires are.

Jesus uses this opportunity to teach about the cost of following Him. If we sincerely follow Him, we will have to deny our own wishes and will. Instead, we will have a burden to carry and sacrifices to make. We have to give these things up willingly. We can gain an eternal spiritual life by giving up our temporary physical life. In the end, what will it matter if we have been successful by worldly standards (money, possessions, power, authority, notoriety, etc.), but, by pursuing these things, we miss out on our eternal reward. If we are ashamed or embarrassed by Christ and the lifestyle He requires, Jesus will be ashamed and embarrassed by us on the day of judgement.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thanks Doug! Good point about the Gentile woman! See you soon in Abilene!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Mark 8:21 (NIV) 21 He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

The Lord has challenged me with that question with embarrassing repetitiveness.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! So many good thoughts regarding these 2 chapters. I am glad you pointed out Isaiah 29. Another good one from this readings is Isaiah 35:5-6, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."

April 15: Mark 9-10 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 4-15-17

Mark 9-10

Jesus begins the 9th chapter by informing them that some of them will see the "kingdom of God" established with power. That phrase can mean different things throughout the scripture. Here it is referring to the church.

6 days later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a mountain and His appearance is altered right before their eyes. Also, Elijah and Moses show up. Peter, with his usual "speak before

thinking” energy, suggests setting up monuments to Christ, Elijah and Moses. We are told that he said this because he did not know what else to say. Many times, especially when we speak before thinking, we say things that we later regret. Obviously, God will not allow any monuments. Instead, they hear a voice similar to what they heard at Jesus’ baptism. Jesus tells them not to tell anyone and they do keep this secret.

As they are trying to figure out what seeing Moses and Elijah seemingly raised from the dead meant, they ask about the teaching from the scribes that Elijah would precede the Messiah. This teaching is taken from Malachi 4:5. Jesus does not tell them that John the Baptist was figuratively Elijah. He agrees with the scribes while also referencing the many prophecies about the suffering of the Messiah and the disrespect He will be shown.

When He gets back to the rest of the disciples, there is another great crowd around them. A man tells Jesus that the disciples could not heal his son who had an evil spirit. Jesus shows exasperation with His disciples and has the boy brought to Him. Jesus is able to cast the spirit out. His disciples approach Him privately wanting to know why they could not help the boy. Jesus tells them that it was apparently a difficult spirit and could only be cast out with prayer and fasting.

Jesus now travels through Galilee as He teaches them about His coming death and resurrection. However, they did not understand and were afraid to ask for clarification.

When they get to Capernaum, Jesus tells them that He knows they were discussing something on the way that they did not want Him to hear. It turns out they were trying to decide who would be the greatest. Whatever criteria they were expecting, Jesus tells them something completely different. If they want to be the greatest, they must become the lowliest servant. Jesus then uses a child as an object lesson. They must be willing to serve everyone and not consider anyone to be below their attention.

They are also concerned because they saw someone casting out demons in the name of Christ. Because they did not know him, they told him to stop. Jesus again surprises them by telling them to leave the man alone. If he is doing good deeds in the name of Christ, he can’t turn around and say disparaging things about Jesus.

Jesus also tells them that anyone that causes one of His sheep to stumble, they will be severely punished. Sin is such a detriment to our service to God that He tells us to do everything we can to eliminate whatever causes us to give in. His is not advocating literally mutilating our bodies. He is telling us to take our sin and its causes seriously.

Jesus now travels to Judea. The Pharisees have a question for Him about the legality of divorce. Jesus wants them to look at what Moses said. When they point out that Moses allowed it, Jesus tells them that it was because of their stubbornness and hard hearts. However, God never intended for divorce to be a part of our lives. A man and woman should become one, apart from their parents, and never be separated from each other. He then gives some difficult teaching. When divorce and remarriage take place, there is sin that occurs. He does not indicate that it is unforgiveable or is an automatic condemnation to hell, but there is sin involved nonetheless.

Again, some children want to get close to Jesus and the disciples do not think it is a good idea. Jesus once more uses them as an object lesson. They seem to have a very difficult time understanding that the humility and innocence of a child is to be emulated not despised.

A man comes to Jesus wanting to know how to gain eternal life. After a discussion about the basics of the law, Jesus tells him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. This is

not a requirement of all followers of Christ, but this man seems to have many possessions and was not able to part with them. These things were causing him to trust in his stuff and not trust in God. Jesus describes this as taking up his cross. All followers have sacrifices they must make and burdens they must bear. Not all of us have exactly the same issues to deal with, but everyone will have something. It is important for us to be honest with ourselves and be willing to give up the things that hinder us from fully trusting God.

Peter, after hearing this exchange, points out that they have given up everything to follow Christ. Jesus tells them that anyone, not just them, who is willing to sacrifice to follow Christ, will gain much more than that as a reward in heaven.

While they are traveling to Jerusalem, Jesus again reminds them that when they get there He will be betrayed, condemned to death, beaten, mocked, killed by the Gentiles and come back to life after three days.

James and John come to Him with a request. They want to be honored in the kingdom (they are thinking about a physical kingdom) by sitting on Jesus right and left hands. Jesus asks them if they are able to be overwhelmed (baptized) the same way He will be. They say they can bear it, but don't understand what is about to happen. Jesus tells them they will indeed have to go through similar trials and suffering, but God will reward those who are deserving. This causes some hard feelings among the other ten. Jesus has to once again teach them about humility and servitude. He points out that leaders in the world wield their authority over those under them. Jesus does not want them to lead this way. He wants them, and us, to lead by serving. He uses Himself as an example. God is going to grant Him great authority because of His willing sacrifice for others, even those who do not appreciate it.

As they approach Jericho, a blind man named Bartimaeus is begging by the side of the road. As He cries out to Jesus, others are telling him to be quiet. He just becomes more urgent in his pleas. Jesus brings him near and heals him. Bartimaeus begins to follow Christ.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
It was such an honor & privilege to hear two great lessons from you today, Doug! Thank you!!!
<3

April 22: Mark 11-12 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for April 22, 2017

Mark 11-12

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey as the people praise Him. This is a fulfillment of prophecy. However, it is late in the day and He does not want to stay in Jerusalem, so they go to Bethany.

On the way back the next day, Jesus is hungry and sees a fig tree. Unfortunately, there are no figs because they were out of season. Jesus pronounces that no one will ever eat figs from that tree again.

When they get to Jerusalem, they go to the Temple and Jesus is aghast at the scene. People are exchanging money and selling doves. They had to turn their Roman currency into a form that was acceptable for the Temple. Under the Law, the poor could substitute doves for the sacrifice. What was not allowed was making money off the exchange or overcharging for the doves. These things were not to take place on the Temple grounds, either. Jesus is only upset because of where they are doing their business and that they are cheating the disadvantaged. His statements in 11:17 are two quotes from the prophets. The first is from Isaiah 56:7 where God is talking about Gentiles who will serve the Lord. The second is from Jeremiah 7:11 where God is talking about the idolatry of Judah. God indicates that He has seen His house become a "den of thieves." This could refer to the people of Jeremiah's day robbing God of the honor and worship that is only due Him. However, I believe it is also a reference to God seeing back then what is going on in front of Jesus now. When Jesus drives the merchants out, the Jewish leaders are more convicted in their desire to kill Him. They now travel back to Bethany for the night.

On the way back to Jerusalem the next day, they see the fig tree dead clear down to the roots. Jesus uses it as an object lesson about the power of faith. God is able to do much more than we could ever ask or imagine. Jesus instructs them to pray without doubting. He also tells them that harboring ill toward someone can interfere with our prayers. We should forgive others so our prayers can be heard and so God will forgive us.

In Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders challenge Him as to the authority He has to do all the things He has done. They are most certainly thinking about the merchants He dislodged because they would have been getting a portion of the profits. Instead of answering, Jesus asks them a question that if they will answer, so will He. He wants them to divulge the source of the Baptism of John. They reason that if they say it was from heaven, Jesus will want to know why they did not believe. If they say it was from men, the people will be angered because John was widely accepted as a prophet. They chicken out and say they don't know. Jesus tells them that He will not answer their question, either.

Now Jesus tells another parable. This one is about a vineyard owner who leases his property to caretakers and goes to another country. When it is time for harvest, he sends a servant to bring him some grapes. The caretakers beat him up and send him away empty handed. The owner sends a succession of servants and they are all either beaten or killed. Having only one son, the owner decides that maybe they will respect him. The son is sent, but they kill him so they can take the vineyard for themselves. Jesus points out that the owner will destroy the caretakers and let others take over. He then quotes from Psalm 118:22-23. The Jewish leaders know that God is the owner, the vineyard is the kingdom of God, they are the caretakers and Jesus is referring to Himself as the Son. Instead of learning from the parable, they become even more determined to rid the world of this Jesus but are afraid right now because of what the people think about Him.

Some of the leaders come to Him to see what He will say about paying taxes to Caesar. If they can get Him to defy the authority of Rome, it will be easier to have Him killed. Jesus gives an answer they are not expecting. He tells them that since the money has Caesar's image, it is appropriate to give it to him. He also reminds them not to neglect giving to God what belongs to Him.

The Sadducees now approach with a question. Their question is about a man that marries but dies before he has any children. In accordance with the Law of Moses, the man's brother

marries the wife. Unfortunately, he also dies before any children are born. This process continues until she has been married to all seven brothers and then she dies. They want Jesus to tell them who she will be married to at the resurrection. This is interesting because the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. Jesus' answer stuns them all. He points out that they do not understand the scriptures or the power of God. He quotes from God's conversation with Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3). God refers to Himself in the present tense (I AM) and twice says He "is" the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (again indicating the present tense). If God recognizes them in the present even though they had been dead for many, many years, then God is the God of the living (resurrection) and not the dead. They have no response for this reasoning.

A scribe now wants Jesus to tell them what the greatest commandment is. With all the commandments that were given through Moses, Jesus had many to choose from. I can just see those around Him trying to guess which one He would pick. Jesus tells them that the most important thing is to love God with every part of your being and life. He also reveals the command that is second greatest; to love your neighbor as yourself. When the scribe agrees with Jesus and even explains why Jesus is correct, Jesus tells him that he is close to understanding the kingdom of God. We, too, should strive to make these the most important things in our life. If we love God with everything, we will only want to do what He asks from us. If we love our neighbors as much as we do ourselves, our behavior toward others will be honorable and upright.

Since no one else is willing to ask another question, Jesus decides to ask one of His own. He wants to know how the Christ can be the son of David when David referred to the Christ as his Lord? The common people seem to understand and accept this, but not the leadership. Jesus then warns them to watch out for the scribes. Even though they look and sound religious, it is all for show and they do not act the way God wants them to.

While Jesus is sitting near the place where people are giving their money offering to the Temple, He sees many rich give a lot of money. However, there was a poor widow who only gave a small sum. Jesus points out to His disciples that she gave more than all the others. He was not judging as men would judge based on the mathematical total. He was judging based on their willingness to sacrifice and the purpose in their hearts. How does God see us when He judges by those standards?

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
About the fig tree . . . Something gets lost in the translation here . . . The point is "By their fruits you shall know them!" People familiar with how figs grow, will know that the first season of fruit appears on the branches BEFORE the leaves emerge! Then there can be two or three subsequent rounds of figs after the tree is in full leaf. SO, if one sees a tree in full leaf, one should expect to find figs! Jesus was not expecting anything besides what the tree was expected to perform, that is, he was not Looking for figs at the wrong time of year. The fig tree was like some people, putting on a show of something but not producing what the master wanted. A person looking at the tree, would think it was a beautiful, productive, tree; close inspection however, proved it to be otherwise! That was the lesson! You may be able to fool some, or even most people, but you cannot fool the LORD and, in the end, you will be condemned and you will perish in your vanity!

Replies:

Doug Twaddell:

So the comment about not being the time for figs doesn't mean they were out of season? That is how I always read it.

Steven Wright:

Right. Thought transfers badly in translation. Ends up saying something very different.

Steven Wright:

Compare the rendering of the same incident in (Matthew 21:18 - 22)

Charles Fry:

Our climate is pretty similar to that of Israel. This is what our fig tree looks like right now, with leaves and green figs. The leaves will be thicker in a few weeks. Passover this year was a week and a half ago, a little earlier than some years.



Doug Twaddell:

Thank you for the information. Very helpful.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

And of course, Jesus also used the incident to teach his disciples about the power of faith.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Faith... And judgment... Mark lays out events so that we have the triumphant entrance, an obvious fulfillment of prophecy of the coming King, concluding with the big nothing as Jesus arrived at the temple, looked around, and left for Bethany. Rather than being crowned, the anointed one was ignored by the priests and rulers. When he came into the temple the next morning, considering Mark said he looked around the evening before, it seems evident he came to do what he did, moving with deliberate purpose among the despoilers of the sanctuary and the sheep of his pasture, and teaching as he went. The cursing of the fig tree is not incidental. Up until then, the disciples had seen Jesus exercising patient control, always doing miracles that brought healing or peace. He fed people and calmed storms. Always benevolent in what he did, even under great pressure. He spoke of judgment, but showed persistent restraint, the path of peace. But our redeemer is also the divinely appointed judge of all, and he showed a glimpse of that aspect of his authority, just a glimpse, when he overturned tables and condemned a leafy but fruitless tree.

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

I agree. The fact that the cleansing of the temple is sandwiched between the two parts of the account of the fig tree in Mark 11 may underscore the theme of judgement. The withering could be prophetic of the Jewish authorities who were about to reject their Messiah.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

This morning, when Kathleen and I were on our way to deliver Katelyn back to her mother, Kathleen mentioned that she wondered why Jesus cursed the fig tree. Being a good husband, I wondered with her. Perhaps the reason is:

A – The fig tree had no fruit on it. But it was not the season for figs so the tree was behaving in a way consistent with its nature; the way God designed it to be. So no fault can be found in the tree itself. I doubt the tree itself was being punished.

B – The tree was cursed as punishment for its owners so that THEY would no longer profit from it. This is in keeping with Genesis 3:17 -

And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

The ground was cursed because of Adam’s sin. The concept of “curse” seems to imply an inability to fulfill the natural purpose for which something was created. A cursed fig tree cannot bear figs. The ground that is cursed cannot grow things as well as occurred in the Garden of Eden. A womb that is cursed will remain barren. Cursed things cannot perform their natural functions.

But no mention is made of the owners.

Furthermore, if the fig tree was somebody’s property, then if Jesus had harvested from it, that would have been in violation of the Mosaic commandment not to steal. “It’s only a fig” would not be a valid excuse. So if the tree was in somebody’s front yard, Jesus would have knocked on the door and asked for permission.

Of course, destroying the tree would have been the destruction of somebody’s property – something that would require restitution. But no mention was made of this. So I don’t think that the tree belonged to anyone.

C – Jesus was wanting to show His power. But Jesus did not use his power and perform miracles merely to show off. Everything He did was out of compassion – His miracles helped people. But no people were helped by this curse.

So why did Jesus curse the fig tree?

I see the remarks, Charles, that you made on this. Was He not showing this same authority by exorcising demons and curing the sick? That action helped people; I’m still mystified by this fig tree.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Yes, Kevin, the same power and authority, but this event, along with driving out the money changers and sellers, does have a different "feel" to it than the other miracles and actions of Jesus, I think. A couple of minor points that you raise, first.

At Passover, which is our time frame in this story, even if the figs were not yet ripe, there should have been figs, especially on a leafed out tree. But there were none.

Eating a handful of grain, or of fruit, was not viewed as stealing, but rather gleaning. The Law had some specific permissions about gleaning (Lev 19:9-10 for example). I don't think anyone of his people would fault Jesus for picking a few figs to eat (unless it was on a Sabbath...)

On the one hand, Jesus had the power, authority, and right to do whatever he wanted with any tree, whether cultivated or wild, but most likely this was a wild fig tree growing along the path between Bethany and Jerusalem. The biggest fig tree I've ever seen was in Jerusalem, growing in a little area of ground south of the temple mount, and I'm pretty sure it was uncultivated, being in an urban area and 30 or 40 ft tall. It was huge, compared to any fig tree I've ever seen here. Most likely, it was a wild fig tree that Jesus cursed, and an unfruitful one at that.

Back to the purpose, God presents himself to us in the Bible as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. Jesus repeatedly warned of judgment and the fire of hell, but whenever his disciples showed any inclination to shut people out, whether children, or gentile women, or some guy casting out demons in Jesus name, or to call down fire from heaven on uncooperative Samaritans, Jesus always rebuked them. He preached judgment, but practiced enormous patience. The signs and wonders were always acts of mercy, and he didn't even "judge" demons "before the time" (Mark 5:1-13 w/Matthew 8:29). But he is judge, by divine appointment (John 5:22-30). People today have some inclination to bypass the reality that Jesus has power both to save and to destroy. On this one occasion, Jesus showed his disciples that he has that power of both life and death. He could have incinerated those crooks in the temple, instead of dumping their tables and chasing them out, but he didn't. The fig tree utterly affirmed that he could have. and that he does have authority to judge, with the power to back it up. He told a parable a couple of days later, describing himself in judgment this way: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'" (Matthew 25:41-43). The cursed fig tree was an object lesson for his disciples, affirming the teaching about the cursed who do not feed him when he is hungry.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thanks!

April 29: Mark 13-14 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 4-29-17

Mark 13-14

As they are leaving the Temple grounds, His disciples point out the impressiveness of the structures. Jesus predicts its destruction. Peter, Andrew, James and John want to know when it will happen and how will they know it is coming. First, Jesus points to three things that will not be signs: different people will claim to be the returned Messiah; nations will continue to fight wars; and natural disasters will occur. What He does say to watch for is persecution from multiple sources. However, He wants them to continue to preach the word to everyone. Eventually, there will be an abomination so severe that it will be unmistakable. When that happens, the believers are to get as far away from Jerusalem as possible. He tells them not even go back for possessions. He also tells them that it could be worse, but God will show mercy to those that believe and shorten this time period. Again, He emphasizes for them not to be deceived by false prophets and those claiming to be the Messiah.

Now He begins to tell them what will happen at some point after that tribulation. The natural order of the physical will be altered. The Son of Man will return as His angels gather those that serve Christ. He uses a fig tree as an example. You can tell when summer is near by the new growth on the tree. In the same way, they will know when the destruction of the Temple is near. However, they cannot know when the second coming will be. We are to be diligently watchful for our Masters return

The chief priests and scribes are trying to figure out how to take Jesus into custody. Because it is the Passover, they decide to wait until it is over to avoid an angry mob.

While at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, a woman (who John identifies as Mary the brother of Lazarus) breaks open an alabaster flask of expensive oil and pours it on Jesus head. Someone (who John identifies as Judas Iscariot) criticizes her by arguing that it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Most likely his frustration is that he could have stolen some of it as he often did. Jesus tells them to leave her alone because they can help the poor anytime, but she has anointed Him for burial.

Judas now begins to make arrangements with the council to betray Jesus for a sum of money.

Jesus sends two of His disciples to prepare a place for them to celebrate the Passover together. When they gather for the feast, Jesus announces that one of them will betray Him. Naturally, they want to know who it is. To find out, they each ask about their own guilt so that when Jesus says "no" they are vindicated. Jesus finally tells them that it is the one who will dip bread in oil at the same time He does.

This is when Jesus establishes the method for honoring and remembering His death and its significance. The only bread that would have been allowed in the house was unleavened and they would have been drinking wine from grapes.

Jesus also takes this opportunity to predict that they will all stumble and scatter that night. However, after He is raised, He will meet them in Galilee. Peter protests the idea that he will stumble. Jesus tells him, specifically, that he will deny Jesus three times before the rooster crows twice. Peter is even more forceful in his protest claiming that he would rather die first.

They leave the city and go to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus instructs them to wait for Him while He goes off to pray, but He takes Peter, James and John with Him. He confesses to them that He is hurting in His very soul about what is going to happen. He goes a little farther away and asks the Father if there is another way to accomplish the goal of salvation. He is willing to go through with the Fathers will and the overwhelming events that are about to occur if there is no other way. When He returns to find them sleeping, he warns them to watch and pray so that temptation will not overtake them. When He tells them that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, I cannot help but think that, even though it is for all of them, perhaps it is a specific point

to make to Peter. After He finds them asleep a third time, he wakes them up and points out the arrival of Judas.

The mob arrives with Judas in the lead. When they get to Jesus, Judas greets Him as Rabbi and kisses Him. This was the confirmation to the leaders that this was Jesus. Peter (identified by John) takes a sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Other accounts point to the healing of this man, but Mark does not. When Jesus addresses the mob by telling them that they are fulfilling scripture, all His disciples run away.

Mark includes a curious event with a young man who is naked except for a linen cloth. When some in the mob try to grab him, he leaves the cloth behind and runs away.

Jesus is taken to the Sanhedrin. It is noted that Peter follows as far as the courtyard where he warms himself by a fire. When they cannot find anything worthy of death, false witnesses begin to come forward. The problem is that they don't have their stories straight. When the High Priest becomes frustrated at both the insufficient charges and the silence of Jesus, He asks Jesus directly if He is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus now has something to say. When He says that the claim is true and that He will be sitting at the right hand of God, the High Priest tears his clothes and condemns Jesus for blasphemy. This leads the council to condemn Him to death and they begin the process of humiliating Him by spitting on Him and beating Him.

Meanwhile, Peter in the courtyard is approached by a servant girl who accuses him of being with Jesus. Peter denies it and hears a rooster crow. When she accuses him a second time, he denies it again. When others begin to level the same accusation based on his speech and genealogy, Peter denies it again with cursing and swearing. When he then hears the rooster crow a second time, he realizes he is guilty of the very thing that Jesus predicted.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

My heart is pierced over & over again when I read these denials from Peter. Praise God, like Peter, I'm restored over & over again, thanks to His death & resurrection. ❤️ thank you for sharing details of Christ's prophecy, testimonies from these chapters and institution of the Lord's Supper. Very good lessons no matter how many times we read them!

May 6: Mark 15-16 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 5-6-17

Mark 15-16

Having secured (in their mind) a confession of blasphemy from Jesus, the Sanhedrin now has a difficult task. Under the old Law, they only needed to secure witnesses and to carry out the stoning. One of the ways the Roman government maintained control over subdued people was to have complete control over capital punishment. The Jewish leadership needed to convince the Romans that Jesus had committed a crime the Romans would consider worthy of death. To do this, they take Him to Pilate.

Since the Romans won't punish Jesus for blaspheming God, the Jews twist His claim to be the King of the Jews (spiritually) to try and convince Pilate that He is a threat to the authority of the Roman Caesar. Pilate is confounded when Jesus refuses to defend Himself or contradict his accusers.

Pilate had started a tradition at Passover to show the Jews that he could be merciful. During the feast, he would release a prisoner and pardon them. He offers to release Jesus in honor of the feast, but the Jewish leaders stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas (a man found guilty of murder and rebellion) and crucify Jesus. Pilate continues to attempt to free Jesus, but, in the end, he consents to the wishes of the crowd. He lets Barabbas go and has Jesus flogged and delivered to be crucified.

The soldiers take over and have their way with Jesus. They dress Him in purple (color of royalty), put a crown of thorns on His head, mock Him as King and spit on Him. As He is led to the site of the crucifixion, He reaches a point where He can no longer carry the crossbeam. They pull Simon, a Cyrenian, from the crowd and force him to carry it the rest of the way.

As they are preparing to nail Him to the cross, they offer Him a mixture of wine and myrrh to drink. This was intended to be a mild sedative that would make it easier to control the victim while they drove the nails. Jesus refuses it. He willingly submits to the horrific treatment and does not struggle to get away. I cannot help but wonder what the soldiers must have thought when they saw Jesus' humility.

After they crucified Him, they cast lots for His clothes and nailed the accusation above His head for everyone to read, "The King of the Jews." Two thieves were crucified with Him (fulfilling a prophesy from Isaiah 53:12). Many in the crowd and the Jewish leaders continue to make fun of Him. After about six hours of hanging on the cross, Jesus accepted a drink of sour wine and died. At that moment, the veil of the Temple was torn from the top to the bottom signifying the end of the Law of Moses and Temple worship. I have often wondered what the priests in the Temple thought when they were suddenly able to see into the Holy of Holies. A centurion, who would have been a Roman soldier, was even able to recognize and confess that Jesus must have been the Son of God. We also find out that there were many of His followers, especially women, who were watching as He died.

Joseph of Arimathea, who was on the council, went before Pilate and formally asked for the Body of Jesus. There is no doubt that the Jewish leadership was monitoring what happened to Jesus. This would have outed Joseph as a follower of Christ. Pilate allowed it and Joseph prepared the body, with help, and laid Jesus in a tomb of rock and rolled a stone in front of the entrance.

After the Sabbath was over ("very early on the first day of the week"), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices to honor the body. When they arrive, the first thing they notice is that the stone has been moved. When they go into the tomb, they see a young man (an angel) sitting there. He tells them not to be frightened and that Jesus had risen from the dead. He wants them to go and tell the disciples to head for Galilee and Jesus will meet them there. However, they do not tell anyone.

After His resurrection, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. When she tells others about seeing Him, they don't believe her. Jesus also appears to two men (Luke records they were walking to Emmaus) and they begin telling everyone, but they do not believe them, either. Eventually, Jesus appears to the eleven apostles and is not pleased with their unbelief. He tells them to preach the Gospel to the whole world. Those that believe are to be baptized. He also tells them that they will be able to work miraculous signs and wonders. Mark's account ends with Jesus being taken up to heaven and the Apostles going out to preach and work miracles to confirm the truth of their message.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Doug! You ask what the soldiers were thinking. Soldiers then, as today, are trained to de-humanize their opponents so making it possible to kill. Soldiers are asked to subjugate their own humanity; that innate knowledge of God's proscription of murder. Can you imagine killing another human being? Probably not. Now think of that other human being as a "gook" or "hun" or whatever derogatory term you want, and that those people are bent on destroying your family. Killing them becomes possible and easier. Perhaps in Jesus' time, Romans used "Jew" as a derogatory term; I doubt they had the sensibilities towards human life that we have today. They were trained to obey orders, not necessarily to think about them. Our troops today learn quickly in a war zone to regard everything as a deadly threat. When they return home, they are overwhelmed by the pace of life here - hyperalert to all movements as being possible threats. This is part of PTSD.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Gaylene Green:

Another thing I hadn't thot of.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

It was a great blessing to be with you and other beloved brethren this weekend, Doug! Thank you for another gospel book summary. Hundreds of years of prophecy fulfilled in a short 30+ year life span, and many fulfilled in 1 day. 2,000+ years later His Kingdom still communes each Lord's Day; therefore proclaiming His death and Resurrection! Praise God for His plan of salvation. Looking forward to meeting in the sky! ❤️

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Gospels

March 18: Mark 1-2 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for March 18

Mark 1-2

Even though Mark never names himself, he was consistently given credit for this book by the early church writers. Mark's mother owned a house in Jerusalem large enough for the church to meet (Acts 12:12). Peter may have been a regular visitor, based on a servant girl recognizing his voice through a door, and called Mark his son (1 Peter 5:13). This common phrase may indicate that Peter baptized him. Mark's cousin was Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), which may be why he was invited to go with Paul on his first journey. Because Mark returned home before the trip was barely started, Paul did not want to take him on the next one. Barnabas lobbied for his cousin, but Paul was unmoved. Paul took Silas and Barnabas took Mark as they went in different directions (Acts 16:36-41). However, Mark appears to be with Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome (Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24). Paul also sends specifically for Mark toward the end of his life calling him "useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). This would indicate that Mark had regained Paul's trust and that Timothy knew him as well.

Mark begins his account with quotations from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 which speak about someone preparing the way for the Messiah. He then gives a description of John and his work, including the baptism of Christ, followed by a very brief account of Satan tempting Christ in the wilderness. Mark does not spend any time discussing Jesus birth or early years. Instead, he seems determined to get right to the work of the Messiah including an account of Peter, Andrew, James and John being called by Him.

Mark describes those at Capernaum being astonished at the authority he seemed to hold when he taught. When he casts an unclean spirit out of a man (even seeming to have a conversation with the spirit itself) they are amazed and His fame begins to spread.

Upon entering the house of Simon (Peter), whose mother-in-law was ill, He heals her. The next thing you know the whole city is bringing their sick and afflicted to Him to be healed. In the morning, well before daylight, he goes off by himself to pray. They finally find Him, indicating that the town is looking for Him, and he announces that they are leaving to go to other cities. This takes Him all through the area of Galilee.

Jesus encounters a man with leprosy. When the man expresses his confidence in Jesus ability to heal him, Jesus does. He tells the man not to tell anyone. I am not sure how someone cured of leprosy could go unnoticed, but it doesn't matter. The man tells anyone within earshot what happened. Now Jesus cannot openly go into a city because of the crowds He is gathering. Instead, He stays outside of the cities and the people come to Him from everywhere.

When He goes back to Capernaum, the crowds grow very large around the house He was in. When the friends of a lame man cannot get through the door, they open an area of the roof and lower him in by ropes. Jesus tells him that his sins are forgiven. The scribes that are there began thinking that only God can forgive sins. Without them saying a word out loud, Jesus addresses their contemplation. He comments that it would be easy for Him to say the man's

sins are forgiven. How could you prove that? So, to show them His power, He heals the man of his physical issues.

When He leaves the city to go to the Sea of Galilee, many follow Him. He sees Matthew (Levi) collecting taxes and tells him to follow and he does. When He has supper at Matthew's house, there are many other tax collectors there. These may have been Matthews's friends and co-workers because no self-respecting Jew would have ever entered a tax collectors house to eat. When the Jewish religious leadership questions this, Jesus tells them that it is the sick that need a doctor. Those that sin need repentance.

When Jesus is asked about why His disciples are not fasting like the followers of John and the followers of the Pharisees, he has an interesting statement. He says that the friends of the bridegroom don't fast while the bridegroom is present. The main comment I will make is to note is that Jesus is referring to Himself as the Bridegroom. The church is not established yet, but Jesus is already laying the foundation of the marriage described in Revelation given to John.

As Jesus and his followers are walking through a field of grain on the Sabbath, they pick some of the grain. The Pharisees are appalled and claim they are violating the Law of Moses. Jesus points out that David and his men ate the showbread that was only for the priests, when they were desperately hungry, without penalty. He points out that the Sabbath was made for man. It was put in place to help and teach man. Instead, the Pharisees had put so many restrictions in place that it seemed like man was a servant to the Sabbath.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! I especially appreciated the history you wrote in the first paragraph. It's good for us to make these connections, see the big picture, and not just think about the chapters assigned. A few comments... 1.) I think it's fascinating that Mark begins the book with the prophecy of Isaiah. Truly, John the Baptist played a significant role in preparing the way for Jesus. Through him all men might believe in Jesus (John 1:7). What John the Baptist testified was true: John 10:41, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man (Jesus) was true." 2.) Mark mentions Jesus was with the wild animals in the desert. I think he's the only gospel writer who reports their presence. It's interesting and helps emphasize God kept Jesus safe during these 40 days.

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

Also, to confirm, Mark is the first gospel that was written, correct?

March 25: Mark 3-4 (Doug Twaddell)

March 25, 2017 Reading

Mark 3-4

After picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus goes to a Synagogue and sees a man with a withered hand. He knows that the Pharisees are watching closely, so He asks them if you should do good or evil on the Sabbath and proceeded to heal the man.

The Pharisees begin trying to figure out how to get rid of Jesus. He leaves Jerusalem and goes to Galilee. People begin arriving from all over. He has His disciples make sure that a boat is ready for them to use if the crowds put them in danger because of their desire to get close to Him.

Jesus hand selects the 12 apostles from His disciples. His plan is to send them out to preach with the power to heal and cast out demons. He gave them this power so they would have proof that their message was from God.

The crowds become so overwhelming that they cannot go about daily tasks, like eating. When those that knew Him when He was younger hear what is going on, they try to get ahold of Him because they think He is crazy.

The scribes try to claim that He is doing all these things because He is serving Satan. Jesus gathers them to discuss this accusation. He points out that it is not logical that Satan would work against himself. If Satan was doing that, he would be defeating his own purpose and building up his enemy. Jesus then makes a very strong accusation against them. He tells them that they are committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and that it will not be forgiven. This particular sin seems to only be possible when someone has evidence that something has happened by the power of God but attributes it to Satan. We know from other passages that many of the Jewish religious leaders believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but did not voice that belief openly because of fear. It is definitely possible that some of these men recognized the power of God, but tried to mislead the people by convincing them that it was from Satan.

When Jesus' mother, Mary, and His brothers arrive, everyone points out to Him that they are here. They may have been among those that were trying to escort Him away because they questioned His sanity. Instead of acknowledging their relationship, He points out that His family is anyone who does the will of God. It is worth noting that Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, is not mentioned. It may be that he simply does not come, but the omission of Him in other accounts during this part of Jesus' life would indicate that Joseph had died.

Jesus now gets into the boat so He can teach those that are along the shore. He tells them the parable of the sower. Not understanding this teaching, the apostles ask Him about the meaning. He points out that the Word of God touches many different hearts. Some are not receptive at all. Others are receptive, but they either lose interest or the distractions of the world get in the way. However, some hearts are receptive and the word grows to produce fruit.

He also tells them the parable of the lamp. It does no good to light the lamp and then cover it up. It should be put on a pedestal to give maximum coverage for the light. He uses this opportunity to warn that we should be careful how we judge others. Whatever standard we use, we should be willing to judge ourselves by.

Jesus also points out that the kingdom of God grows even though we might not completely understand how. He compares it to a farmer that plants the crop, but does not control the growth. The farmer simply cares for and watches the crop until it is time for the harvest. We, too, cannot control the growth of the church. We can simply plant, care for and watch with the knowledge that one day there will be a harvest. He also compares it to a mustard seed. It may start off small and humble, but it grows into a mighty plant.

Jesus decides they need to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They are spread out among several boats. While they are crossing, a storm forms. While everyone else is panicking as they fear for their lives, Jesus is asleep. They wake Him up while asking, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" What a question to ask Jesus, especially after all the miracles they had personally witnessed. Jesus simply stands up and says, "Peace, be still!" Amazingly, the storm,

even the wind, completely and totally stops. Jesus connects their fear to a lack of faith. If they had faith in the power of Christ, which they had seen with their own eyes, they would not have been afraid at all.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
Mark 3:25 "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." (Not only today's Bible reading but also summative statement of this week in politics. :)

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
Politics is a house that I cannot stand.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! I can hear your voice as I read each Saturday's gospel summary. It's a great encouragement. <3 A few things that triggered my thoughts... The crowds became so overwhelming. This is an important statement! Even non-Christian contemporary writers give this description for Jesus (multitude of followers). This provides evidence! Another thing that really hit me was thinking of Jesus quoting Isaiah. As mentioned last night, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies in Isaiah exactly. Finally, last thing I'll mention is only Mark records the parable in 4:26-29. I appreciated your thoughts on this. The mysterious power of the seed - The Word - is emphasized. While we, God's Kingdom, may be oblivious to how God makes the seed grow, we are called to lead people to repentance and obedience to God. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) As well, we are called to be reapers in God's harvest. "Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" (Matthew 9:37-38)

Comment:

Charles Fry:
A theme Mark highlights more than the other gospels is the weakness, slowness, failures of the disciples. Perhaps Mark's own less than stellar early experience as a helper to Barnabas and Saul sharpened his insight into understanding that all disciples need to know that even Jesus chosen ones had such problems.

Mark 4:39-41 (NIV)

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Notice the fear wasn't over when the squall ended. Notice the very strong word, "terrified" and that this was said after the weather was stilled. Terrified of Jesus?

April 1: Mark 5-6 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for April 1, 2017

Mark 5-6

This chapter begins with an account of a man that was tormented by an evil spirit. The community had decided to chain him up, but he was able to break the bindings and was now living in a graveyard. When Jesus approaches him, the spirit begs Jesus not to bother him. Jesus commands him to leave the man and also asks the spirit's name. The spirit calls himself "Legion, for we are many." The spirits ask to be sent into a herd of swine. I find it interesting that a herd of swine could be found in Israel. The swine then run off a cliff into the sea and drown. Naturally, those taking care of the sheep run and tell everyone. When they return, the previously uncontrollable man is clothed, calm and acting normally. They beg Jesus to leave the area. The man wants to go with Jesus, but Jesus tells him to go proclaim what has happened to anyone that will listen.

When they return to the other side of the sea, a great many people gather. Jairus, one of the rulers of the local synagogue, pleads with Jesus to help his daughter who is dying. This would have taken great courage. This man is likely to have been in on various efforts to find a way to silence Jesus. But now, when there is no hope, he turns to Christ for help.

On the way to Jairus' home, a woman is in the crowd that has had a bleeding problem for 12 years. She is convinced that if she can just touch Jesus' clothes she can be healed. She finally gets close enough to touch Him and immediately she is healed. Jesus also knows immediately what has happened. When she realizes that she is found out, she is scared. Jesus does not scold her, but praises her for her faith.

While Jesus is still talking to her, a servant of Jairus arrives to tell him that his daughter is dead. Jesus tells Jairus not to be afraid. When they get to his house, Jesus goes in with only Peter, James and John. He tells the family and friends that are mourning that she is only sleeping. They don't believe Him, so He makes them all leave. Jesus takes the girl's hand and tells her to get up. She immediately comes back to life.

When Jesus leaves he goes back to the area of Nazareth. On the Sabbath Day, He is teaching in the synagogue. Those listening cannot understand how the carpenter's son they knew could have come by the education Jesus seems to possess. Instead of being interested in the information, they reject Him. Jesus comments that a prophet is often rejected by those that know him. It is even true today that people often have to overcome their background with those that knew them when they were younger.

Jesus leaves that area and sends the apostles out in groups of two. They are only allowed to take the clothes on their back. They are told that some will not receive them, but instructed that God will deal with them at the judgement. As they preach repentance, they also cast out demons and heal.

When King Herod hears about the amazing things that Jesus is doing, he is concerned. Even though there is disagreement about whom Jesus is, Herod is convinced that He is John the Baptist back from the dead. Herod knew that he had killed John the Baptist. When Herod had married his brother's wife, Herodias, John had been outspoken against it. Herod had John imprisoned, but Herodias was not satisfied with that. At a feast, Herod's daughter entertained

them and Herod was so pleased he told her he would give her anything up to half his kingdom. As per her mother's suggestion, she asked for the head of John the Baptist. Even though he did not want to do that, he consented and instructed that John would be beheaded. The disciples gave John's body a proper burial.

When the apostles return from their travels, they are excited to share with Jesus all their experiences. Jesus encourages them to go to a deserted place by themselves to rest. Apparently, they had not even taken much time to care for their basic needs, like eating, because they were so busy.

When they leave in a boat, the crowds see them going and rush to meet them when they land. Jesus sees all of the people and has compassion on them. He begins to teach them. As the day is coming to a close, the disciples are concerned about the crowd. There is no food where they are at and it will take some time to get back to the city. Jesus tells them to give them something to eat. The disciples are now concerned because they do not have enough money to buy all the food that would be needed. Jesus asks them what they have on hand. All they have is five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus has the crowd sit in groups. He then blessed the food and begins dividing it up. Before too long, everyone is full and there are twelve baskets of leftovers. With two loaves and five fish, Jesus had fed over 5000 people and ended up with much more than He started.

Now Jesus has the Apostles travel by boat to Bethsaida while He sends the crowds away and spends time alone to pray. About evening, the boat is in the middle of the sea and is in trouble. A storm is making difficult for them to make any headway. About 3am, Jesus comes walking on the water toward them. Thinking it is a ghost, they panic. Jesus assures them that it is Him. The wind immediately stops when He steps into the boat. This amazes them. It is beyond their understanding. Mark records that they also had not understood what happened with the loaves and fishes because their hearts were hardened.

When they land at Gennesaret, they are recognized right away. Everyone begins to bring anyone they know that is sick or handicapped. Everywhere they go, crowds follow just so they can touch his clothes and be healed. Mark points out that everyone that touched His clothes was healed. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that, later on, people are trying to get ahold of Paul's handkerchief thinking they will be healed by touching it.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Jesus: The Great Physician! I marvel over these miracles. Yet nothing compares to His ability to heal us from all sin. Thank you, Doug Twaddell I love these testimonies.

April 8: Mark 7-8 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 4-8-17

Mark 7-8

The Pharisees notice that some of Jesus' disciples did not follow the established ritual for washing their hands before they ate. This was not a part of the Law, just a tradition of the Jewish leadership. When they ask Jesus about it, He references Isaiah 29:13. He points out that the people are treating the traditions of men as if they were commands of God. By doing this, they are worshiping in vain. He is not saying that traditions are innately wrong. His concern is that the traditions are considered a higher authority than God's direct commands.

He points to one example. The law said that children should care for their parents. In opposition to that law, it had become a tradition that the children could tell their parents that the money they had to give to them had been promised to the Temple. This tradition allowed a loophole to avoid the commandment. Jesus indicates that they had set up many such traditions.

Apparently referring back to the original accusation of not participating in a traditional hand washing, Jesus tells the crowd it is what comes out of a man that defiles him, not what goes into him. His disciples ask for clarification as they go into a house. Jesus reminds them that when evil comes out of a person, whether in words or actions, it is a reflection of the person's heart. These are the things that defile a person, not the things they eat. This would have been shocking for a Jew to hear because of their high regard for the dietary laws and traditions that had intensified those restrictions.

When Jesus travels to the area of Tyre and Sidon, He would like to be incognito. That becomes impossible. A gentile woman comes to Him asking for help for her daughter who had a demon. Jesus comments on whether He should give to dogs (Gentiles) what was intended for children (Jews). She responds that even dogs are allowed to eat the crumbs that the children drop. This is an interesting viewpoint of some of the Jews tepid reaction (or outright rejection) of Christ. She may not know it, but she is alluding to something that God will say later when He tells the Jews that He will give the kingdom to the Gentiles. Jesus immediately removes the demon from the girl.

Now He travels to the Sea of Galilee where a man is brought to Him who is deaf and has a speech impediment. Jesus puts His fingers in the man's ears and touches His tongue and the man is healed. Jesus tells them not to tell anyone, but how do you hide this? In fact, the more Jesus asks them to keep it quiet, the more it is spread. That is human nature, isn't it? All this time His fame and popularity expands.

Again, the crowds become enormous. Jesus again becomes concerned about their ability to have food. He approaches his disciples to find out how much food they have. They only have seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. Just like before, Jesus has the people sit down while he blesses the food. After everyone is full, they collect seven baskets of leftovers. This time He had fed about 4,000 people. Jesus and his disciples leave in a boat to the area of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees start arguing with Him asking for a sign. Jesus becomes frustrated. First, He asks them why they are looking for a sign. What do they think Jesus has been doing all this time? Second, He tells them that they will not be given a sign. Jesus is pointing out that signs have been given and they are ignoring them. If they cannot recognize Him from the signs He is doing, they would not accept any sign.

When they get into the boat again, we are told that no one had brought any bread with them. Jesus uses this as a teachable moment to point out that the leaven (influence) of the Pharisees and Herod can spread and should be guarded against. The disciples start wondering if Jesus is referring to the fact that they did not bring any bread. Jesus becomes frustrated at their lack of understanding. He reminds them of the time He fed 5,000 with only five loaves and when He fed 4,000 with seven loaves. He asks them to remember how much was left over. Jesus wanted them to connect the dots. He wanted them to realize that, under the right conditions, a little can go a long way. If left unchecked, false doctrine and evil can negatively impact many people. With God's help, the smallest amount of good, though it seems insignificant, can have a positive impact on many people.

When Jesus arrives in Bethsaida, a blind man is brought to Him. He leads the man out of town, spits in his eyes and touches him to heal him. Jesus then asks if he can see anything. The man describes men looking like trees and walking around. Jesus puts His hands on the man's eyes again and the man can see perfectly clearly. Again, Jesus instructs the man not to go back to town and not to tell anyone. How can you hide a former blind man that can now see?

Jesus and His disciples now travel to Caesarea Philippi. On the way, He asks what rumors they hear about who He is. They answer John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets or there are other ideas. Jesus asks them who they think He is. Peter says that He is the Christ. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them about what He will have to suffer and that He will die and rise again three days later. Peter takes exception to this idea and pulls Jesus aside to discuss it. Jesus becomes very stern with Peter. He says, "Get behind me Satan." This is an indication that Peter is not thinking about what God's will is but what his own desires are.

Jesus uses this opportunity to teach about the cost of following Him. If we sincerely follow Him, we will have to deny our own wishes and will. Instead, we will have a burden to carry and sacrifices to make. We have to give these things up willingly. We can gain an eternal spiritual life by giving up our temporary physical life. In the end, what will it matter if we have been successful by worldly standards (money, possessions, power, authority, notoriety, etc.), but, by pursuing these things, we miss out on our eternal reward. If we are ashamed or embarrassed by Christ and the lifestyle He requires, Jesus will be ashamed and embarrassed by us on the day of judgement.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thanks Doug! Good point about the Gentile woman! See you soon in Abilene!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Mark 8:21 (NIV) 21 He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

The Lord has challenged me with that question with embarrassing repetitiveness.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! So many good thoughts regarding these 2 chapters. I am glad you pointed out Isaiah 29. Another good one from this readings is Isaiah 35:5-6, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."

April 15: Mark 9-10 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 4-15-17

Mark 9-10

Jesus begins the 9th chapter by informing them that some of them will see the "kingdom of God" established with power. That phrase can mean different things throughout the scripture. Here it is referring to the church.

6 days later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a mountain and His appearance is altered right before their eyes. Also, Elijah and Moses show up. Peter, with his usual "speak before

thinking” energy, suggests setting up monuments to Christ, Elijah and Moses. We are told that he said this because he did not know what else to say. Many times, especially when we speak before thinking, we say things that we later regret. Obviously, God will not allow any monuments. Instead, they hear a voice similar to what they heard at Jesus’ baptism. Jesus tells them not to tell anyone and they do keep this secret.

As they are trying to figure out what seeing Moses and Elijah seemingly raised from the dead meant, they ask about the teaching from the scribes that Elijah would precede the Messiah. This teaching is taken from Malachi 4:5. Jesus does not tell them that John the Baptist was figuratively Elijah. He agrees with the scribes while also referencing the many prophecies about the suffering of the Messiah and the disrespect He will be shown.

When He gets back to the rest of the disciples, there is another great crowd around them. A man tells Jesus that the disciples could not heal his son who had an evil spirit. Jesus shows exasperation with His disciples and has the boy brought to Him. Jesus is able to cast the spirit out. His disciples approach Him privately wanting to know why they could not help the boy. Jesus tells them that it was apparently a difficult spirit and could only be cast out with prayer and fasting.

Jesus now travels through Galilee as He teaches them about His coming death and resurrection. However, they did not understand and were afraid to ask for clarification.

When they get to Capernaum, Jesus tells them that He knows they were discussing something on the way that they did not want Him to hear. It turns out they were trying to decide who would be the greatest. Whatever criteria they were expecting, Jesus tells them something completely different. If they want to be the greatest, they must become the lowliest servant. Jesus then uses a child as an object lesson. They must be willing to serve everyone and not consider anyone to be below their attention.

They are also concerned because they saw someone casting out demons in the name of Christ. Because they did not know him, they told him to stop. Jesus again surprises them by telling them to leave the man alone. If he is doing good deeds in the name of Christ, he can’t turn around and say disparaging things about Jesus.

Jesus also tells them that anyone that causes one of His sheep to stumble, they will be severely punished. Sin is such a detriment to our service to God that He tells us to do everything we can to eliminate whatever causes us to give in. His is not advocating literally mutilating our bodies. He is telling us to take our sin and its causes seriously.

Jesus now travels to Judea. The Pharisees have a question for Him about the legality of divorce. Jesus wants them to look at what Moses said. When they point out that Moses allowed it, Jesus tells them that it was because of their stubbornness and hard hearts. However, God never intended for divorce to be a part of our lives. A man and woman should become one, apart from their parents, and never be separated from each other. He then gives some difficult teaching. When divorce and remarriage take place, there is sin that occurs. He does not indicate that it is unforgivable or is an automatic condemnation to hell, but there is sin involved nonetheless.

Again, some children want to get close to Jesus and the disciples do not think it is a good idea. Jesus once more uses them as an object lesson. They seem to have a very difficult time understanding that the humility and innocence of a child is to be emulated not despised.

A man comes to Jesus wanting to know how to gain eternal life. After a discussion about the basics of the law, Jesus tells him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. This is

not a requirement of all followers of Christ, but this man seems to have many possessions and was not able to part with them. These things were causing him to trust in his stuff and not trust in God. Jesus describes this as taking up his cross. All followers have sacrifices they must make and burdens they must bear. Not all of us have exactly the same issues to deal with, but everyone will have something. It is important for us to be honest with ourselves and be willing to give up the things that hinder us from fully trusting God.

Peter, after hearing this exchange, points out that they have given up everything to follow Christ. Jesus tells them that anyone, not just them, who is willing to sacrifice to follow Christ, will gain much more than that as a reward in heaven.

While they are traveling to Jerusalem, Jesus again reminds them that when they get there He will be betrayed, condemned to death, beaten, mocked, killed by the Gentiles and come back to life after three days.

James and John come to Him with a request. They want to be honored in the kingdom (they are thinking about a physical kingdom) by sitting on Jesus right and left hands. Jesus asks them if they are able to be overwhelmed (baptized) the same way He will be. They say they can bear it, but don't understand what is about to happen. Jesus tells them they will indeed have to go through similar trials and suffering, but God will reward those who are deserving. This causes some hard feelings among the other ten. Jesus has to once again teach them about humility and servitude. He points out that leaders in the world wield their authority over those under them. Jesus does not want them to lead this way. He wants them, and us, to lead by serving. He uses Himself as an example. God is going to grant Him great authority because of His willing sacrifice for others, even those who do not appreciate it.

As they approach Jericho, a blind man named Bartimaeus is begging by the side of the road. As He cries out to Jesus, others are telling him to be quiet. He just becomes more urgent in his pleas. Jesus brings him near and heals him. Bartimaeus begins to follow Christ.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
It was such an honor & privilege to hear two great lessons from you today, Doug! Thank you!!!
<3

April 22: Mark 11-12 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for April 22, 2017

Mark 11-12

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey as the people praise Him. This is a fulfillment of prophecy. However, it is late in the day and He does not want to stay in Jerusalem, so they go to Bethany.

On the way back the next day, Jesus is hungry and sees a fig tree. Unfortunately, there are no figs because they were out of season. Jesus pronounces that no one will ever eat figs from that tree again.

When they get to Jerusalem, they go to the Temple and Jesus is aghast at the scene. People are exchanging money and selling doves. They had to turn their Roman currency into a form that was acceptable for the Temple. Under the Law, the poor could substitute doves for the sacrifice. What was not allowed was making money off the exchange or overcharging for the doves. These things were not to take place on the Temple grounds, either. Jesus is only upset because of where they are doing their business and that they are cheating the disadvantaged. His statements in 11:17 are two quotes from the prophets. The first is from Isaiah 56:7 where God is talking about Gentiles who will serve the Lord. The second is from Jeremiah 7:11 where God is talking about the idolatry of Judah. God indicates that He has seen His house become a "den of thieves." This could refer to the people of Jeremiah's day robbing God of the honor and worship that is only due Him. However, I believe it is also a reference to God seeing back then what is going on in front of Jesus now. When Jesus drives the merchants out, the Jewish leaders are more convicted in their desire to kill Him. They now travel back to Bethany for the night.

On the way back to Jerusalem the next day, they see the fig tree dead clear down to the roots. Jesus uses it as an object lesson about the power of faith. God is able to do much more than we could ever ask or imagine. Jesus instructs them to pray without doubting. He also tells them that harboring ill toward someone can interfere with our prayers. We should forgive others so our prayers can be heard and so God will forgive us.

In Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders challenge Him as to the authority He has to do all the things He has done. They are most certainly thinking about the merchants He dislodged because they would have been getting a portion of the profits. Instead of answering, Jesus asks them a question that if they will answer, so will He. He wants them to divulge the source of the Baptism of John. They reason that if they say it was from heaven, Jesus will want to know why they did not believe. If they say it was from men, the people will be angered because John was widely accepted as a prophet. They chicken out and say they don't know. Jesus tells them that He will not answer their question, either.

Now Jesus tells another parable. This one is about a vineyard owner who leases his property to caretakers and goes to another country. When it is time for harvest, he sends a servant to bring him some grapes. The caretakers beat him up and send him away empty handed. The owner sends a succession of servants and they are all either beaten or killed. Having only one son, the owner decides that maybe they will respect him. The son is sent, but they kill him so they can take the vineyard for themselves. Jesus points out that the owner will destroy the caretakers and let others take over. He then quotes from Psalm 118:22-23. The Jewish leaders know that God is the owner, the vineyard is the kingdom of God, they are the caretakers and Jesus is referring to Himself as the Son. Instead of learning from the parable, they become even more determined to rid the world of this Jesus but are afraid right now because of what the people think about Him.

Some of the leaders come to Him to see what He will say about paying taxes to Caesar. If they can get Him to defy the authority of Rome, it will be easier to have Him killed. Jesus gives an answer they are not expecting. He tells them that since the money has Caesar's image, it is appropriate to give it to him. He also reminds them not to neglect giving to God what belongs to Him.

The Sadducees now approach with a question. Their question is about a man that marries but dies before he has any children. In accordance with the Law of Moses, the man's brother

marries the wife. Unfortunately, he also dies before any children are born. This process continues until she has been married to all seven brothers and then she dies. They want Jesus to tell them who she will be married to at the resurrection. This is interesting because the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. Jesus' answer stuns them all. He points out that they do not understand the scriptures or the power of God. He quotes from God's conversation with Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3). God refers to Himself in the present tense (I AM) and twice says He "is" the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (again indicating the present tense). If God recognizes them in the present even though they had been dead for many, many years, then God is the God of the living (resurrection) and not the dead. They have no response for this reasoning.

A scribe now wants Jesus to tell them what the greatest commandment is. With all the commandments that were given through Moses, Jesus had many to choose from. I can just see those around Him trying to guess which one He would pick. Jesus tells them that the most important thing is to love God with every part of your being and life. He also reveals the command that is second greatest; to love your neighbor as yourself. When the scribe agrees with Jesus and even explains why Jesus is correct, Jesus tells him that he is close to understanding the kingdom of God. We, too, should strive to make these the most important things in our life. If we love God with everything, we will only want to do what He asks from us. If we love our neighbors as much as we do ourselves, our behavior toward others will be honorable and upright.

Since no one else is willing to ask another question, Jesus decides to ask one of His own. He wants to know how the Christ can be the son of David when David referred to the Christ as his Lord? The common people seem to understand and accept this, but not the leadership. Jesus then warns them to watch out for the scribes. Even though they look and sound religious, it is all for show and they do not act the way God wants them to.

While Jesus is sitting near the place where people are giving their money offering to the Temple, He sees many rich give a lot of money. However, there was a poor widow who only gave a small sum. Jesus points out to His disciples that she gave more than all the others. He was not judging as men would judge based on the mathematical total. He was judging based on their willingness to sacrifice and the purpose in their hearts. How does God see us when He judges by those standards?

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
About the fig tree . . . Something gets lost in the translation here . . . The point is "By their fruits you shall know them!" People familiar with how figs grow, will know that the first season of fruit appears on the branches BEFORE the leaves emerge! Then there can be two or three subsequent rounds of figs after the tree is in full leaf. SO, if one sees a tree in full leaf, one should expect to find figs! Jesus was not expecting anything besides what the tree was expected to perform, that is, he was not Looking for figs at the wrong time of year. The fig tree was like some people, putting on a show of something but not producing what the master wanted. A person looking at the tree, would think it was a beautiful, productive, tree; close inspection however, proved it to be otherwise! That was the lesson! You may be able to fool some, or even most people, but you cannot fool the LORD and, in the end, you will be condemned and you will perish in your vanity!

Replies:

Doug Twaddell:

So the comment about not being the time for figs doesn't mean they were out of season? That is how I always read it.

Steven Wright:

Right. Thought transfers badly in translation. Ends up saying something very different.

Steven Wright:

Compare the rendering of the same incident in (Matthew 21:18 - 22)

Charles Fry:

Our climate is pretty similar to that of Israel. This is what our fig tree looks like right now, with leaves and green figs. The leaves will be thicker in a few weeks. Passover this year was a week and a half ago, a little earlier than some years.



Doug Twaddell:

Thank you for the information. Very helpful.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

And of course, Jesus also used the incident to teach his disciples about the power of faith.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Faith... And judgment... Mark lays out events so that we have the triumphant entrance, an obvious fulfillment of prophecy of the coming King, concluding with the big nothing as Jesus arrived at the temple, looked around, and left for Bethany. Rather than being crowned, the anointed one was ignored by the priests and rulers. When he came into the temple the next morning, considering Mark said he looked around the evening before, it seems evident he came to do what he did, moving with deliberate purpose among the despoilers of the sanctuary and the sheep of his pasture, and teaching as he went. The cursing of the fig tree is not incidental. Up until then, the disciples had seen Jesus exercising patient control, always doing miracles that brought healing or peace. He fed people and calmed storms. Always benevolent in what he did, even under great pressure. He spoke of judgment, but showed persistent restraint, the path of peace. But our redeemer is also the divinely appointed judge of all, and he showed a glimpse of that aspect of his authority, just a glimpse, when he overturned tables and condemned a leafy but fruitless tree.

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

I agree. The fact that the cleansing of the temple is sandwiched between the two parts of the account of the fig tree in Mark 11 may underscore the theme of judgement. The withering could be prophetic of the Jewish authorities who were about to reject their Messiah.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

This morning, when Kathleen and I were on our way to deliver Katelyn back to her mother, Kathleen mentioned that she wondered why Jesus cursed the fig tree. Being a good husband, I wondered with her. Perhaps the reason is:

A – The fig tree had no fruit on it. But it was not the season for figs so the tree was behaving in a way consistent with its nature; the way God designed it to be. So no fault can be found in the tree itself. I doubt the tree itself was being punished.

B – The tree was cursed as punishment for its owners so that THEY would no longer profit from it. This is in keeping with Genesis 3:17 -

And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

The ground was cursed because of Adam’s sin. The concept of “curse” seems to imply an inability to fulfill the natural purpose for which something was created. A cursed fig tree cannot bear figs. The ground that is cursed cannot grow things as well as occurred in the Garden of Eden. A womb that is cursed will remain barren. Cursed things cannot perform their natural functions.

But no mention is made of the owners.

Furthermore, if the fig tree was somebody’s property, then if Jesus had harvested from it, that would have been in violation of the Mosaic commandment not to steal. “It’s only a fig” would not be a valid excuse. So if the tree was in somebody’s front yard, Jesus would have knocked on the door and asked for permission.

Of course, destroying the tree would have been the destruction of somebody’s property – something that would require restitution. But no mention was made of this. So I don’t think that the tree belonged to anyone.

C – Jesus was wanting to show His power. But Jesus did not use his power and perform miracles merely to show off. Everything He did was out of compassion – His miracles helped people. But no people were helped by this curse.

So why did Jesus curse the fig tree?

I see the remarks, Charles, that you made on this. Was He not showing this same authority by exorcising demons and curing the sick? That action helped people; I’m still mystified by this fig tree.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Yes, Kevin, the same power and authority, but this event, along with driving out the money changers and sellers, does have a different "feel" to it than the other miracles and actions of Jesus, I think. A couple of minor points that you raise, first.

At Passover, which is our time frame in this story, even if the figs were not yet ripe, there should have been figs, especially on a leafed out tree. But there were none.

Eating a handful of grain, or of fruit, was not viewed as stealing, but rather gleaning. The Law had some specific permissions about gleaning (Lev 19:9-10 for example). I don't think anyone of his people would fault Jesus for picking a few figs to eat (unless it was on a Sabbath...)

On the one hand, Jesus had the power, authority, and right to do whatever he wanted with any tree, whether cultivated or wild, but most likely this was a wild fig tree growing along the path between Bethany and Jerusalem. The biggest fig tree I've ever seen was in Jerusalem, growing in a little area of ground south of the temple mount, and I'm pretty sure it was uncultivated, being in an urban area and 30 or 40 ft tall. It was huge, compared to any fig tree I've ever seen here. Most likely, it was a wild fig tree that Jesus cursed, and an unfruitful one at that.

Back to the purpose, God presents himself to us in the Bible as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. Jesus repeatedly warned of judgment and the fire of hell, but whenever his disciples showed any inclination to shut people out, whether children, or gentile women, or some guy casting out demons in Jesus name, or to call down fire from heaven on uncooperative Samaritans, Jesus always rebuked them. He preached judgment, but practiced enormous patience. The signs and wonders were always acts of mercy, and he didn't even "judge" demons "before the time" (Mark 5:1-13 w/Matthew 8:29). But he is judge, by divine appointment (John 5:22-30). People today have some inclination to bypass the reality that Jesus has power both to save and to destroy. On this one occasion, Jesus showed his disciples that he has that power of both life and death. He could have incinerated those crooks in the temple, instead of dumping their tables and chasing them out, but he didn't. The fig tree utterly affirmed that he could have. and that he does have authority to judge, with the power to back it up. He told a parable a couple of days later, describing himself in judgment this way: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'" (Matthew 25:41-43). The cursed fig tree was an object lesson for his disciples, affirming the teaching about the cursed who do not feed him when he is hungry.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thanks!

April 29: Mark 13-14 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 4-29-17

Mark 13-14

As they are leaving the Temple grounds, His disciples point out the impressiveness of the structures. Jesus predicts its destruction. Peter, Andrew, James and John want to know when it will happen and how will they know it is coming. First, Jesus points to three things that will not be signs: different people will claim to be the returned Messiah; nations will continue to fight wars; and natural disasters will occur. What He does say to watch for is persecution from multiple sources. However, He wants them to continue to preach the word to everyone. Eventually, there will be an abomination so severe that it will be unmistakable. When that happens, the believers are to get as far away from Jerusalem as possible. He tells them not even go back for possessions. He also tells them that it could be worse, but God will show mercy to those that believe and shorten this time period. Again, He emphasizes for them not to be deceived by false prophets and those claiming to be the Messiah.

Now He begins to tell them what will happen at some point after that tribulation. The natural order of the physical will be altered. The Son of Man will return as His angels gather those that serve Christ. He uses a fig tree as an example. You can tell when summer is near by the new growth on the tree. In the same way, they will know when the destruction of the Temple is near. However, they cannot know when the second coming will be. We are to be diligently watchful for our Masters return

The chief priests and scribes are trying to figure out how to take Jesus into custody. Because it is the Passover, they decide to wait until it is over to avoid an angry mob.

While at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, a woman (who John identifies as Mary the brother of Lazarus) breaks open an alabaster flask of expensive oil and pours it on Jesus head. Someone (who John identifies as Judas Iscariot) criticizes her by arguing that it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Most likely his frustration is that he could have stolen some of it as he often did. Jesus tells them to leave her alone because they can help the poor anytime, but she has anointed Him for burial.

Judas now begins to make arrangements with the council to betray Jesus for a sum of money.

Jesus sends two of His disciples to prepare a place for them to celebrate the Passover together. When they gather for the feast, Jesus announces that one of them will betray Him. Naturally, they want to know who it is. To find out, they each ask about their own guilt so that when Jesus says "no" they are vindicated. Jesus finally tells them that it is the one who will dip bread in oil at the same time He does.

This is when Jesus establishes the method for honoring and remembering His death and its significance. The only bread that would have been allowed in the house was unleavened and they would have been drinking wine from grapes.

Jesus also takes this opportunity to predict that they will all stumble and scatter that night. However, after He is raised, He will meet them in Galilee. Peter protests the idea that he will stumble. Jesus tells him, specifically, that he will deny Jesus three times before the rooster crows twice. Peter is even more forceful in his protest claiming that he would rather die first.

They leave the city and go to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus instructs them to wait for Him while He goes off to pray, but He takes Peter, James and John with Him. He confesses to them that He is hurting in His very soul about what is going to happen. He goes a little farther away and asks the Father if there is another way to accomplish the goal of salvation. He is willing to go through with the Fathers will and the overwhelming events that are about to occur if there is no other way. When He returns to find them sleeping, he warns them to watch and pray so that temptation will not overtake them. When He tells them that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, I cannot help but think that, even though it is for all of them, perhaps it is a specific point

to make to Peter. After He finds them asleep a third time, he wakes them up and points out the arrival of Judas.

The mob arrives with Judas in the lead. When they get to Jesus, Judas greets Him as Rabbi and kisses Him. This was the confirmation to the leaders that this was Jesus. Peter (identified by John) takes a sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Other accounts point to the healing of this man, but Mark does not. When Jesus addresses the mob by telling them that they are fulfilling scripture, all His disciples run away.

Mark includes a curious event with a young man who is naked except for a linen cloth. When some in the mob try to grab him, he leaves the cloth behind and runs away.

Jesus is taken to the Sanhedrin. It is noted that Peter follows as far as the courtyard where he warms himself by a fire. When they cannot find anything worthy of death, false witnesses begin to come forward. The problem is that they don't have their stories straight. When the High Priest becomes frustrated at both the insufficient charges and the silence of Jesus, He asks Jesus directly if He is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus now has something to say. When He says that the claim is true and that He will be sitting at the right hand of God, the High Priest tears his clothes and condemns Jesus for blasphemy. This leads the council to condemn Him to death and they begin the process of humiliating Him by spitting on Him and beating Him.

Meanwhile, Peter in the courtyard is approached by a servant girl who accuses him of being with Jesus. Peter denies it and hears a rooster crow. When she accuses him a second time, he denies it again. When others begin to level the same accusation based on his speech and genealogy, Peter denies it again with cursing and swearing. When he then hears the rooster crow a second time, he realizes he is guilty of the very thing that Jesus predicted.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

My heart is pierced over & over again when I read these denials from Peter. Praise God, like Peter, I'm restored over & over again, thanks to His death & resurrection. ❤️ thank you for sharing details of Christ's prophecy, testimonies from these chapters and institution of the Lord's Supper. Very good lessons no matter how many times we read them!

May 6: Mark 15-16 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 5-6-17

Mark 15-16

Having secured (in their mind) a confession of blasphemy from Jesus, the Sanhedrin now has a difficult task. Under the old Law, they only needed to secure witnesses and to carry out the stoning. One of the ways the Roman government maintained control over subdued people was to have complete control over capital punishment. The Jewish leadership needed to convince the Romans that Jesus had committed a crime the Romans would consider worthy of death. To do this, they take Him to Pilate.

Since the Romans won't punish Jesus for blaspheming God, the Jews twist His claim to be the King of the Jews (spiritually) to try and convince Pilate that He is a threat to the authority of the Roman Caesar. Pilate is confounded when Jesus refuses to defend Himself or contradict his accusers.

Pilate had started a tradition at Passover to show the Jews that he could be merciful. During the feast, he would release a prisoner and pardon them. He offers to release Jesus in honor of the feast, but the Jewish leaders stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas (a man found guilty of murder and rebellion) and crucify Jesus. Pilate continues to attempt to free Jesus, but, in the end, he consents to the wishes of the crowd. He lets Barabbas go and has Jesus flogged and delivered to be crucified.

The soldiers take over and have their way with Jesus. They dress Him in purple (color of royalty), put a crown of thorns on His head, mock Him as King and spit on Him. As He is led to the site of the crucifixion, He reaches a point where He can no longer carry the crossbeam. They pull Simon, a Cyrenian, from the crowd and force him to carry it the rest of the way.

As they are preparing to nail Him to the cross, they offer Him a mixture of wine and myrrh to drink. This was intended to be a mild sedative that would make it easier to control the victim while they drove the nails. Jesus refuses it. He willingly submits to the horrific treatment and does not struggle to get away. I cannot help but wonder what the soldiers must have thought when they saw Jesus' humility.

After they crucified Him, they cast lots for His clothes and nailed the accusation above His head for everyone to read, "The King of the Jews." Two thieves were crucified with Him (fulfilling a prophesy from Isaiah 53:12). Many in the crowd and the Jewish leaders continue to make fun of Him. After about six hours of hanging on the cross, Jesus accepted a drink of sour wine and died. At that moment, the veil of the Temple was torn from the top to the bottom signifying the end of the Law of Moses and Temple worship. I have often wondered what the priests in the Temple thought when they were suddenly able to see into the Holy of Holies. A centurion, who would have been a Roman soldier, was even able to recognize and confess that Jesus must have been the Son of God. We also find out that there were many of His followers, especially women, who were watching as He died.

Joseph of Arimathea, who was on the council, went before Pilate and formally asked for the Body of Jesus. There is no doubt that the Jewish leadership was monitoring what happened to Jesus. This would have outed Joseph as a follower of Christ. Pilate allowed it and Joseph prepared the body, with help, and laid Jesus in a tomb of rock and rolled a stone in front of the entrance.

After the Sabbath was over ("very early on the first day of the week"), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices to honor the body. When they arrive, the first thing they notice is that the stone has been moved. When they go into the tomb, they see a young man (an angel) sitting there. He tells them not to be frightened and that Jesus had risen from the dead. He wants them to go and tell the disciples to head for Galilee and Jesus will meet them there. However, they do not tell anyone.

After His resurrection, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. When she tells others about seeing Him, they don't believe her. Jesus also appears to two men (Luke records they were walking to Emmaus) and they begin telling everyone, but they do not believe them, either. Eventually, Jesus appears to the eleven apostles and is not pleased with their unbelief. He tells them to preach the Gospel to the whole world. Those that believe are to be baptized. He also tells them that they will be able to work miraculous signs and wonders. Mark's account ends with Jesus being taken up to heaven and the Apostles going out to preach and work miracles to confirm the truth of their message.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Doug! You ask what the soldiers were thinking. Soldiers then, as today, are trained to de-humanize their opponents so making it possible to kill. Soldiers are asked to subjugate their own humanity; that innate knowledge of God's proscription of murder. Can you imagine killing another human being? Probably not. Now think of that other human being as a "gook" or "hun" or whatever derogatory term you want, and that those people are bent on destroying your family. Killing them becomes possible and easier. Perhaps in Jesus' time, Romans used "Jew" as a derogatory term; I doubt they had the sensibilities towards human life that we have today. They were trained to obey orders, not necessarily to think about them. Our troops today learn quickly in a war zone to regard everything as a deadly threat. When they return home, they are overwhelmed by the pace of life here - hyperalert to all movements as being possible threats. This is part of PTSD.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Gaylene Green:

Another thing I hadn't thot of.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

It was a great blessing to be with you and other beloved brethren this weekend, Doug! Thank you for another gospel book summary. Hundreds of years of prophecy fulfilled in a short 30+ year life span, and many fulfilled in 1 day. 2,000+ years later His Kingdom still communes each Lord's Day; therefore proclaiming His death and Resurrection! Praise God for His plan of salvation. Looking forward to meeting in the sky! ❤️

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Gospels

May 13: Luke 1-2 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for May 13, 2017

Luke 1-2

Luke is an interesting New Testament author. He was a physician that traveled extensively with Paul and wrote this Gospel and the book of Acts. In Colossians 4:10-11, Paul refers to three men (Aristarchus, Mark and Justus) as the only “fellow workers ... who are of the circumcision.” He then refers to three other men (Epaphras, Luke and Demas) as also being with him. This would indicate that Luke was not a Jew which would make him the only gentile author of a New Testament book.

Luke opens with an explanation. We first find out that he is writing from the standpoint of someone that was not an eyewitness to everything from the beginning, but he has been instructed by someone that was and has a complete understanding of the events. He also tells the reader that his goal is to make an “orderly account.” I take this to mean that Luke went to great pains to ensure that chronological order was maintained.

When Luke begins his historical account, he actually starts before Jesus is born. His is the only Gospel that details the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist. We find out that John’s father was a priest named Zacharias, his mother, Elizabeth, was also a descendent of Aaron and they both were righteous before God. That was not something that could be said about all of the priestly line.

While Zacharias is burning incense in the Temple, an angel appears to him. The angel tells him that they will have a son and should name him John. He is also told that this son will turn many in Israel back to God and will serve before God in the “spirit and power of Elijah.” When Zacharias asks about his age and wants proof, the angel explains that he is Gabriel and tells him that he will not be able to speak until John is born.

Six months later, Gabriel appears to Mary and announces that she will have a Son and will name Him Jesus. Gabriel also tells her some of the honors that will come to Him. He will be great, will be called the Son of the Highest, God will give Him the throne of His father David, He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and His kingdom will never end. When Mary expresses her confusion, she is told about Elizabeth (who had not made her pregnancy public). This is enough for Mary to believe and accept the word Gabriel.

Mary goes to see Elizabeth. When Mary first begins speaking, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and feels John “leap” in her womb. She then pronounces a blessing on Mary and recognizes the baby Mary is carrying as her Lord. Mary then gives a lengthy praise to God and expresses her humility. We then find out that Mary stays there for three months. The timing shows the possibility that Mary was there when John is born.

Everyone is overjoyed when John is born. When they prepare to circumcise him on the eighth day, they also have to decide what to name him. The family wants to name him after his father. Evidently Zacharias and Elizabeth had discussed this, because she tells them they will name

him John. The family is confused because that is not a family name. When Zacharias writes that his name will be John, he is suddenly able to speak again and he gives a prophecy about John's role in preparing the way for the Messiah and that God's promise to Abraham is about to be fulfilled.

We don't know any more about John's upbringing. We are only told that he grew, had a strong spirit and lived in the deserts until he became known to Israel.

Luke now takes up the account of Jesus' birth. We find out that Caesar Augustus is the emperor and he has ordered that a census be taken. Joseph is to take his family to Bethlehem to be registered. While there, Mary goes into labor and has no choice but to give birth to Jesus in the holding areas for the animals.

Out in the country, some shepherds are taking care of their sheep. An angel appears to them and tells them about the birth of the Savior. They are told that he can be found in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. Suddenly they can see a multitude of angels all praising God. They hurry to Bethlehem to see this for themselves. The shepherds return to the fields glorifying and praising God.

When Jesus is eight years old, they have Him circumcised and formally named. After Mary has waited the full days of her purification (according to the Law), they bring Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord and redeem Him with a sacrifice (according to the Law). The fact that they offer two turtledoves or pigeons speaks to their financial poverty.

While they are at the Temple, Simeon arrives at the urging of the Spirit. He had been told by God that he would see the Messiah before he died. Simeon takes Jesus and prophesies that He would be the salvation of the people and would bring revelation to the Gentiles. He also tells Mary that a sword will pierce her soul. While this may refer to her sorrow at seeing her Son crucified, I believe it refers to her process of arriving at a complete belief in Him as the Messiah and following Him. This statement is given after predicting that Jesus would cause the rise and fall of many Jews and this would be revealed in their hearts. The words of Jesus have the ability to pierce us through to our very souls to convict us of our sin. What is revealed is our humility or pride as we decide what to do with that knowledge.

Simeon is immediately followed by Anna. She was a widow of 84 years and a prophetess who had dedicated herself serving God in the Temple with prayer and fasting. Upon seeing Jesus, she talks about Him to all those that were looking for redemption in Jerusalem. The scriptures tell us that Jesus was brought into the world at just the right time. I believe that part of this was the sociological and governmental situation. However, part of this must also be that there were Jews who were listening to, digging into and at least partially comprehending the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

Jesus returns to Jerusalem and we are told that He "grew and became strong in the spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." Jesus had to learn obedience. I am convinced that some of the knowledge He displayed, especially as a child, was due to the education and influence of His parents. We know that Mary paid attention to the things He did and somewhat knew what He was capable of. At the Canaanite wedding, she does not know precisely what he will do, but she knows the servants should do whatever He told them.

When Jesus is 12 years old, His family travels back to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. His parents just assume that He is with someone in the group when they start home. They must have panicked when they could not locate Him. This was the Messiah that was entrusted to them by God through prophesy. What will be the outcome and how will God respond if they have lost Him? After three days of searching, they find Him in the Temple. He is listening and

asking questions of the teachers, but He was also answering questions with such understanding that He astonished them. His parents chastise Him when they find Him because of their concern. Jesus' simple answer is "Didn't you know that I would be about My Father's business. He was speaking of God, but they did not understand.

Again, we are told that Jesus was subject to His parents, but Mary remembered all these things and contemplated them. During this time, He grew physically and spiritually. He also was liked by men and pleasing to God.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Charles Fry:
Good Doug!

Jesus grew.... He was human in every way, yet without sin. He could impress the scholars when he was 12, but still too had the immaturity of a 12 year old boy who frightened his parents by his unexplained absence. It was Paul who wrote, "When I was a child, I thought like a child..." But we can be sure Jesus thought like a child too, when he was a child. That's a remarkable and wonderful thing to know!

Comment:

Wendy Range:
Thanks, Doug! I thought this was interesting reading (probably something you've studied in the past) when it comes to what environment Jesus was born in, and subsequently laid in a manger: <https://answersingenesis.org/holidays/christmas/born-in-a-barn-stable/>

Replies:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Wendy, for this link!

May 20: Luke 3-4 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for May 20, 2017

Luke 3-4

Luke gives us a very specific time stamp. He uses Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Phillip (Herod's brother), Lysanias, Annas and Caiaphas to establish these events in history. Since Tiberius succeeded Augustus in A.D. 14 John's preaching begins sometime in A.D. 29.

John's message was twofold. First, he preached baptism for repentance from sin. He was not shy to point out the faults of the Jewish leadership. He called them snakes and challenged them to bear fruits worthy of repentance. Second, as prophesied by Isaiah, he prepared the way for the Messiah. He warns that God could produce children of Abraham from anywhere (the Gentiles would soon be acceptable) and that every tree not bearing fruit will be destroyed (those leaders had better get in line with God and His Messiah).

Many came to John with questions about how to live a life in concert with God's expectations. He told tax collectors not to collect any more tax than they were supposed to. He told soldiers not to mistreat or falsely accuse anyone nor take bribes. When they wondered if he was the promised Messiah, he left no doubt that the Messiah would be much greater than he was.

John's blunt message of repentance from sin was not welcomed by Herod, who had sinned with his brother's wife. We find out that Herod ended up putting John in prison in order to squelch any uprising against Herod.

We also find out that while John was baptizing people, Jesus came and was baptized by him. Luke does not go into much detail about this, but does mention the Spirit taking the form of a dove which landed on Him and the voice of God from heaven.

Luke also gives us our second genealogy of Jesus. Matthew's list starts with Abraham and works forward through Joseph's family. Luke chooses to start with Jesus and work backward all the way to Adam and then God Himself. Always striving for accuracy, he comments that Jesus was assumed to be the son of Joseph. This, and the names in the lineage, lead me to believe that this list is through Mary, not Joseph. Matthew shows His kingly heritage, His right to the throne of David and the fulfillment of the promise of God to Abraham. Luke shows His physical heritage as the Seed of Woman (not man) that God promised would bruise the head of Satan.

Luke now gives an account of Satan approaching Jesus to tempt Him. Satan throws everything he can think of at Jesus, but the Messiah does not give in to the temptation. He fends Satan off with the proper application of the Word of God (even though Satan tried to twist it to his own use).

When Jesus returns to Galilee, His fame has spread. People are flocking to hear Him teach. While He is at Nazareth, His hometown, He reads from Isaiah when the scroll is handed to Him. The reading is a prophesy of Isaiah about the coming Messiah. When He finishes reading, everyone is waiting to hear what He has to say. Jesus tells them that the prophecy has been fulfilled in their presence right then. Those who knew Him as a young boy have trouble making the connection. Jesus knows they want Him to perform the miracles and signs they have heard about from other places. Instead, He tells them that a prophet is never accepted in his own country and gives a cryptic response about Elijah and the widow of Sidon as well as Elijah and Naaman. He seems to be telling them that there will be no signs in Nazareth because they won't accept Him. Instead He God is sending Him to other areas, just like Elijah, to find those willing to believe and obey. This makes them extremely angry and they force Him to the edge of a cliff intending to kill Him. Jesus simply walks right through them. Either they are not able to see Him or they are restrained from being able to do anything to Him.

Jesus travels to Capernaum and encounters a man with a demon. The demon recognizes Jesus and taunts Him. Jesus casts the demon out, the man is unharmed and the fame of Jesus spreads even further.

When Jesus comes to Peter's house, He finds Peter's mother-in-law is sick. Jesus heals her and she begins to follow Him. All throughout His travels in Galilee, He heals people and casts out demons. These demons were apparently openly testifying that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God. When Jesus tries to leave the area, the people do not want Him to go. Notice the difference in the reception here versus in Nazareth. Jesus tells them that there are others that need to hear His message and He must go to those places, too.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
Both lineages show the Messiah as a son of David. Solomon and Nathan. Luke's lineage is a perfect circle from Jesus back to God. Imperfect beings enclosed with two perfect beings, the Son and the Father. 77 names.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! I would have loved to witness Jesus unroll the scroll and read the prophecy that he was fulfilling in their very presence! Goosebumps!!!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:
So sorry to be so far behind. Anyway, I have a question about John. The word of God came to him in the wilderness and then he began preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. I assume that God told John to preach this. My question is: Was this preaching merely a training exercise for the people (preparing the way) or were their sins actually forgiven? Did God expect the ones who had been baptised with water to undergo the real baptism later with the Holy Spirit?

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:
When Aquilla and Priscilla hear Apollos preaching in Ephesus in Acts 18, they take note that he is teaching accurately about the Lord, but only teaches the baptism of John. They then take him aside to explain the way of God more accurately. When Paul arrives in chapter 19, he asks them if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed as is taught by Peter in Acts 2. They don't even seem to know about the Holy Spirit. Paul then asks what they were baptized into and they say it was John's baptism. Paul then explains that John's baptism was for repentance and the people he baptized were told by John to believe on Christ Jesus when He came after John. When the people in Ephesus understand what Paul is saying, they are baptized into the name of Jesus. This would indicate that they were baptized, not again for the same thing, but into the name of Jesus. When John's father, Zacharias, prophesies after John's birth, he says that John will "give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins." (Luke 1:77) John's baptism and teaching did not forgive sins (they were still under the Old Law) but he did teach them that the coming Messiah would provide forgiveness and remission of sin. This should not have been a surprise as many of the prophets testified to this very concept.

Comment:

Lowell Hermon:
Mark 1:4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:
Thank you!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Matt 21:24-26, 31-32

24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism — where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

... Jesus said to them,

"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

NIV

John's message and baptism were indeed for the children of Abraham (Luke 3:7-8, Acts 13:24), people who already had a covenant relationship with God through Abraham and under the Law. John's preaching and his baptism focused on repentance for forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3-4 "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.", and Matthew 21:32). In Matthew 3 we have the theme of repentance highlighted in v2, 8, and 11 with confessing sins and being baptized in v6. These themes carry over into the Christian faith, and forgiveness of sins is connected to repentance, confession, and baptism in both John's preaching and Christian preaching, as in the conversion reports included in Acts.

The forgiveness of sins in John's baptism was based on repentance within an existing covenant relationship with God, for the people of Israel. The theme of repentance for the forgiveness of sins wasn't new, other prophets had proclaimed that theme (see Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:47-51, Ezekiel 18:21-23). Repentance and sacrifice, repentance and confession, repentance and prayer, repentance and baptism, the Law and Prophets, including the last great prophet, John, offered forgiveness for repentance that resulted in change, genuine turning from sin.

The forgiveness of sin in Christian baptism, in the name of Jesus, still calls for repentance, and produces results John's baptism could not, such as a new birth (John 3:5-6), a new covenant (, a new life set free from sin, cleansing by the blood of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit, circumcision of the heart.

Forgiveness under the Law was real, but it was also based on the contingency that at the right time God would provide the necessary atoning sacrifice by sending his son into the world (See Hebrews 7:18-19, 27-28, 10:4). Those who were forgiven under the Law, including those who received John's baptism, needed the redemption of the blood of Jesus. Those who lived to hear the gospel, even if they had been cleansed by the sacrifices of the Law, or by repenting and submitting to John's baptism (like those Doug referenced in Acts 19), still needed to repent and be baptized into Christ for the ongoing forgiveness of sins provided by the immortal high priest serving in the presence of God, with the new birth and New Covenant relationship, with the indwelling Spirit and freedom from slavery to sin (Romans 6).

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thanks, Charles!

Marc Hermon:

We've had this discussion before on whether or not every person baptized with John's baptism (including the apostles) all needed to be re-baptized after the resurrection. I'm probably in the pretty small minority camp that think they didn't need to be. If a person accepted John's baptism with the understanding and correct faith that it was looking for the future Christ, then I have a hard time thinking that didn't cover them. It covered people like Abraham who "was credited with righteousness" until the Messiah removed his sins also. The reason I'm in the minority is because I have a hard time answering the question "Well, when did they then receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?" I just don't know. Perhaps when Jesus rose from the grave the believers that had accepted John's baptism received the HS in their hearts at that time. Although I don't know the answer, the Lord could have easily done this miracle. I do know that we have no example of anyone who received John's baptism before Christ's resurrection being required to be re-baptized again after Christ's resurrection. That doesn't mean they weren't, we just don't have an example of it. The example in Acts 19 is not an example of this. It is, however, a good example that re-baptism is necessary if we are initially baptized with an incomplete and incorrect faith. Since they had received John's baptism they were still looking forward to the Christ which means they did not have an understanding of what Jesus had already done for them. This is an erroneous faith for the time they were being baptized and clearly necessitated a re-baptism into Christ with full assurance of what He had done and thereby receiving the Holy Spirit. As Charles said, Christ came at the "right time" appointed by God. But this was an interesting transition period especially to the Jews and many families. Spouses all of a sudden found themselves unequally yoked. Masters now had servants that were their brothers in Christ. It was an amazing and very difficult transition for many people and Paul says "remain as you are" in whatever station of life and live for Christ. We can definitely agree that Christ saved those who were obedient to his commands (whether they were commanded to be re-baptized or not). We also can definitely agree on what side of Christ's resurrection we are all on today and what kind of obedience is required from us....and we praise HIM for his indescribable gift!

Doug Twaddell:

Absolutely Acts 19 applies to those that accepted John's baptism after the time that Christ'

Doug Twaddell:

(oops) after the time that Christ's baptism was in effect. We can be confident of our own salvation through knowledge, obedience, faith and hope.

Charles Fry:

At the risk of speaking and thus revealing my folly, some of these things seem somewhat important to me.

1. Rather than hypotheticals, don't we have explicit examples and instructions that don't call for speculation in terms of Christian baptism?

2. Abraham is a splendid example of faith. No one after the cross was instructed to be circumcised or offer animal sacrifices as he did, because Jesus purchased a people with his blood and established a new covenant.

3. I am puzzled why it seems incredible to ask people who believe in Jesus to be baptized in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, if they hadn't already done that. Perhaps we have notions about that process that we superimpose back onto the generation of Jesus and his disciples. Those (Jewish) folks were used to the idea of a

ritual dip in water every time they were made unclean or approached the temple. There were ritual baths for dunking in Jewish households and public ritual baths all around Jerusalem, and concentrated near the temple. I would be astonished if anyone who had been baptized by John, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins with no promise whatsoever for new covenant, new life, thought that they had received "salvation in Christ" by what they had done, as Jews under the Law. I doubt that anyone who had been baptized by John would have rejected or questioned baptism into Christ because "I was already baptized." That imputes modern schismatic thinking into an earlier era.

4. Gal 3:26-27 " You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (NIV)
How many people did John baptize into Christ? There is no equivocation here. None. He could not and did not baptize anyone into Christ. None of the folks he did baptize had clothed themselves with Christ unless and until they were baptized into Christ. There were Jews in the Galatian churches, the problem of Judaizing the Christian faith was a major theme of the letter, and in the next verse after those above Paul asserted that "you are all one in Christ Jesus." There is only one Biblical way to get there, "in Christ Jesus," and John couldn't do it when that way wasn't opened until Jesus opened it, after John had died.

Charles Fry:

5. Jesus did deal with his disciples directly, on the night of his betrayal when he washed their feet, and after his resurrection when he appeared to them. On the night of his betrayal he pronounced them "clean" except for Judas, and referred to them having bathed. Perhaps a reference to their baptism by John. But, he said they needed him to wash their feet or they would "have no part in him." (John 13:8-11). Then after his resurrection he "breathed on them and said, 'receive the Holy Spirit.'" (John 20:22). I don't know that he did that with anyone in Galilee, or anyone anywhere else, but he did do something in behalf of the disciples, and it would be presumption to suppose he extended this beyond the disciples, when John only mentions these things including the disciples.

6. Did the apostles command people who had been baptized by John to be baptized in the name of Jesus? I think it is obvious they did. In Acts 2:38 with the gathering of "devout Jews" (Acts 2:5) in Jerusalem, it makes no sense to assume that none of those who responded to the gospel that day had previously been baptized with John's baptism. We know his message had gone to Alexandria in Egypt (the Apollos story in Acts 18) and to Antioch of Pisidia (as Paul referenced in Acts 13:24, "Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel." Do note the "before" as well as the expanse and the limit of John's message.) There must have been people in that crowd of God fearing Jews who had been baptized by John. Whether there were or weren't, neither at Pentecost nor any other time did the preachers of the gospel take a poll to weed out people who had been previously baptized by John or anyone else. Peter did not say "every one of you who hasn't already been baptized" in Acts 2:38, he covered them all, "every one of you, repent and be baptized." No polling for whatever people had previously done or believed.

We have no hint in the command to baptize disciples in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20) that there were exceptions based on the calendar, no hint that "one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." (Ephesians 4:3-6) had exceptions, that some people had a different baptism, before the cross, which explicitly did not include the Spirit because John couldn't give the Spirit, and

these folks received what they had never been promised, and didn't participate in the one baptism Paul wrote about.

Charles Fry:

7. Were the disciples who had received John's baptism in Acts 19 recently baptized? I don't know, the text doesn't say that. Did Apollos baptize them? I don't know, the text doesn't say that either. It seems questionable though. If Apollos had been the one who taught them, wouldn't he have corrected that before he left Ephesus to go to Corinth? Perhaps Luke was providing examples known to him, to show that in fact, as other scriptures indicated, John's message had gone far and wide among the Jews of the diaspora, and the question of the limitations of John's baptism sometimes came up in the preaching of the gospel. Notice that Paul first asked a "when" question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2). With their negative reply and expression of ignorance, he didn't then ask, "When were you baptized?" because "when" didn't matter. What did matter is "what baptism did you receive?" (Acts 19:3) and the answer was "John's baptism." It still was not a matter of "when were you baptized?" because Paul still didn't ask about the timing, or parse his message with, "well, that would be fine if it had been before 33 AD but it was too late for you!" Instead he ignored any interest in when and went on to say John's baptism wasn't for people who believe in Jesus. People who believe in Jesus need to be baptized by Jesus' authority. That really is what he said. "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." And when they heard that, they argued that they'd already been baptized, thanks anyway. No, they promptly were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, not the prophet John. Timing wasn't the issue, and we don't know the timing. What baptism was the issue.

8. No one baptized with John's baptism was "baptized into Jesus' death." (Romans 6:3), no matter when they were baptized. They couldn't be buried with Jesus before Jesus was buried, they couldn't rise to new life before Jesus was raised, and neither John nor anyone else ever said they could or would or should. The apostles themselves did not believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus before it happened, not one of them. Christian baptism is based on faith in something quite specific, which only became possible after Jesus was raised from the dead. Col 2:12 "buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

9. Neither Abraham nor John the Baptist nor the thief on the cross was called on to be baptized into Christ, because they all lived on the old covenant side of history. If Abraham or John or the thief had been alive in the flesh in the crowd at Pentecost, then Peter's command to be baptized in the name of Jesus would have been pertinent to them, as to everyone else who heard that message.

10. Jesus meant something when he said, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matt 11:11)
Why would he say such a thing? Isn't it because John could only say, "he is coming" while anyone in the kingdom can say "he has come" and proclaim salvation in his name. John couldn't do that. He couldn't give the Holy Spirit to anyone. He couldn't baptize anyone into Christ. He couldn't give anyone what Jesus had not yet bought. He lived and died under the old covenant. His baptism was part of the old covenant. The baptism Jesus commanded after his resurrection is New Covenant, with promises and blessings John never made or thought he could make.

Marc Hermon:

I told you I was in the minority. :) I think the "devout" that you mentioned in Acts 2 isn't a reference to their devotion to Christ. It's a reference to their devotion to Judaism. In several occasions in Peter's speech he accuses them of being wicked and killing the Son of God. I don't get the impression from Peter's speech that these were people being re-baptized. And I wish I could, but its too difficult for me to believe that the events of Acts 19 aren't a direct result of the events at the end of Ch. 18. I think the context demonstrates that they had been recently baptized with John's baptism. As I said earlier and I will admit again, I just don't know because I don't think we have definitive proof one way or the other. We can be clear what we need for salvation in the era that we are living and I'm convinced that it was made clear for them also on whether or not they had to be re-baptized.

Charles Fry:

I would suggest that if one ignores all the other scriptures about John and his baptism, and about baptism into Christ, and the giving of the Holy Spirit (which one should not ignore), just the two stories Luke related in Acts 18-19 convey clearly and purposefully that John's baptism is not acceptable for the preaching of the gospel and John's baptism is not sufficient for the disciple of Christ.

Marc Hermon:

I agree. John's baptism was not acceptable for anyone who received it after the resurrection of Jesus Christ which is exactly what I think Acts 18 and 19 is telling us that had happened. Before the resurrection, however, John's baptism was acceptable for preaching the good news of the coming Messiah and kingdom. Jesus says in Luke 7, "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." Baptism is the "answer" to accept and be obedient to Christ and is how we get the Holy Spirit. I hope no one thinks that I'm belittling it or purposely ignoring scriptures. I just can't unequivocally say that the Spirit didn't fall on those later who had previously accepted the preaching of John about the coming Christ. I just think this is well within the realm of possibilities of how God handled this unique time and unique people who lived during the time of Jesus. God handled another unique people, the first Gentiles, in a unique way also giving them the Holy Spirit before baptism. But this doesn't diminish the importance and requirement of baptism that they were immediately commanded to do to be obedient. That being said, I love you Charles Fry because of how much you make me constantly think about things. The odds are highly in your favor of being correct. I find myself being wrong a lot! When we get to heaven if we find out that indeed everyone was required to be re-baptized I will promise to give you a high-five...if our spiritual bodies allow us to do that. :)

Charles Fry:

I'll say again, "received it after the resurrection of Jesus..." is an unstated assumption, not in the text of Acts 19.

Marc, it's no lack of respect for you or affection for you that prompts me to respond (again and again). I generally intend to avoid being disagreeable, and I do have both the utmost respect for you, as a believer, a teacher, a Christian man, and I love you, enjoy your insights and humor, and appreciate the good work you do. I am also well acquainted with holding a minority viewpoint. However, on some subjects, and baptism is one of them, I've participated in too many Bible studies where folks are sure there are "exceptions" or "examples" that lead to the conclusion baptism into Christ is not (always) necessary, although the New Testament offers no alternatives.

To cite Cornelius as unique, yes, it was only the second instance of an event like that, which is to say, it was a sign, like the events at Pentecost were a sign. But it was not an exception to the consistent message that those who believed needed to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was poured out, they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of prophecy (Joel, John the Baptist, and Jesus on the specific of the Spirit, Acts 11:15-18). I don't know that they received the "indwelling Holy Spirit" at that moment in time, I don't know that the apostles received the "indwelling Holy Spirit" at Pentecost either, they may have received that measure of the Spirit when Jesus breathed on them and said "receive the Holy Spirit." Peter recognized that the sign though (partly because he'd been prepped for it) and did what? He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus. There was no exception. The Lord provided a sign to confirm what had always been the will of God, that the gentiles too should share in the blessing. Because of the sign Peter was able to say, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?" And he was able to defend that act as the will of God. This story affirms the consistent example and commandment that that people who believed and repented were to be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Cornelius had been obedient, right up to sending for Peter and welcoming him and listening to him, but he needed to be buried with Christ, needed to be born again, needed to have new life and freedom in Christ, all of which are associated with Christian baptism, and none of which are associated with any other baptism.

One last comment, a semantic detail, and I'll let this go, as I probably should have before now. I've come to be uncomfortable with the term "rebaptized." It can be misleading I think. If a person needs to be baptized into Christ, it is because they haven't been yet really been baptized into Christ. If they had some other baptism, then being baptized into Christ isn't a repeat, isn't rebaptism, it is baptism into Christ. One isn't reburied with Christ or reborn again. or reraised together with Christ. These things happen once and for all. The folks in Acts 19 aren't said to have been "rebaptized" or "baptized again," they are described as having previously had John's baptism, and then at Paul's clarification and command, they "were baptized into the name of Lord Jesus."

God be with you and bless you, always.

Marc Hermon:

Don't you feel though that it is partly stated in Acts 19:4? "And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." It seems to me that Paul is stating that the wrong thing about their baptism was it was based on looking forward to something that had already occurred and so based on an incorrect faith for that time. And why did they have this incorrect faith? I don't think it's a big assumption at all that Acts 18:25 answers that question. The text states that Apollos had to be corrected because he was preaching and I think baptizing with John's baptism. The text does not state that he was able to get back to every person and correct his teaching. The end of Acts 18 is supposed to help us understand the situation that Paul encounters in Acts 19.

I too have been in way too many discussions where people are looking for exceptions to obedience to Christ through immersion. I hope none of the readers of our discussion think either one of us have talked about a salvation outside of an immersion. As I stated earlier, Jesus himself in Luke 7 says that the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God by rejecting the baptism of John which He had purposed for them to prepare their hearts for the acceptance of His son.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

I really appreciate all the comments and viewpoints and knowledge that has gone into this discussion! This is where learning is at its best. Thank you again, Marc, for facilitating this group.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Ditto on everything Kevin said!

May 27: Luke 5-6 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 5-27-17

Luke 5-6

Jesus arrives at the Lake of Gennesaret where He sees some fisherman cleaning their nets. He asks one of the boat owners, Peter, to take Him out a little way where He sits in the boat and teaches the people on the shore. After He is done, He suggests that they head on out and catch some fish. Peter points out that they haven't been able to catch anything all night. However, he agrees to follow instructions. They catch so many fish that it is necessary to call for help bringing it in. Peter is humbled by the experience as were James and John. Jesus tells them that they will now begin catching men. When they return to shore, the men leave their boats behind and start following Christ.

In a different city, Jesus encounters a leper who approaches Him and expresses faith that Jesus can heal him. Jesus does heal him and tells him to follow the Law given to Moses and show himself to the priest to be declared clean. As a result, many come to Him to be healed.

Now the crowds become severely large with people wanting to be healed. While He is at one house, some men bring a friend who is paralyzed. When they cannot get in the door, they go up to the roof and let him down that way. Jesus is impressed by their faith and tells the man that his sins are forgiven. The scribes and Pharisees are skeptical of Jesus' authority to do this and offended that He would claim that ability. Jesus points out that it would be easy to claim that his sins are forgiven since that is not something that can be verified by men. To prove He can do this, Jesus tells the man to pick up his bed and walk. When the man does, it amazes the crowd.

Jesus now sees a man named Levi (Matthew) collecting taxes. When Jesus tells him to follow Him, Levi does. Afterward, Jesus goes to Levi's house for a meal. Naturally, there are many other tax collectors there. The scribes and Pharisees complain that Jesus ate with obvious sinners. Jesus' argument is that those who are sick need a doctor. Therefore, sinners need the Savior. Jesus does not point out here that all have sinned so the Jewish leaders also need a Savior. The tax collectors knew that they were in need of Jesus. The Jewish leaders thought they were above the need for Jesus.

He is asked why the followers of John the Baptist fasted but His don't. Jesus alludes to Himself as the bridegroom and says that the friends don't fast while the bridegroom is there. There will be plenty of reasons and time to fast when He is gone.

He now has a parable for them. He tells them that no one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment to patch an old one with. Also, you don't put new wine into an old wineskin. The new cloth will need to shrink and might cause another tear. Besides, who would damage a new garment to try and save an old? The new wine will still be fermenting, causing the formation of gas which could burst the old, inflexible skin. A new skin can stretch with the expanding wine. These sayings seem to indicate that trying to fit new into old does not always work well. The implication is that trying to fit the Law that Christ will bring into the pattern of the Law given by Moses is not going to work. Not only is there no way to merge the two successfully, in the end both will be ruined to the point of being useless.

On the Sabbath day, Jesus and His disciples are walking through a field and picking grain that they immediately eat. The Jewish leaders cry foul claiming they have violated the law of the Sabbath. Jesus brings up David and his men eating the showbread from the Tabernacle that only the Priests could eat. This was allowed because God said it was and He was Lord of the Tabernacle. Jesus informs them that He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

On another Sabbath, Jesus encounters a man with a withered hand. The Jewish leaders are watching to see what He will do. Jesus simply asks them if the Sabbath is for doing good or for doing evil, for helping or for harming. When no one answers, He heals the man. The Jewish leaders are furious with this.

Jesus takes time, at this point, to go off by Himself to pray. When He returns, He selects the twelve that are to be called Apostles. He then travels from Jerusalem to the coast of the Mediterranean teaching and healing.

Luke now records the teachings we often call the beatitudes. Jesus uses these words to give hope to the hopeless and to comfort the downtrodden. He also calls on them to love those that hate them or treat them badly. We should treat others the same way we would want to be treated if the roles were reversed. If we are only nice to those that are nice to us, what is the big deal? Even evil people will sometimes do that. The challenge is to be kind and merciful to those who are not that way toward us; to give to people who cannot repay it. We must always remember that God has been kind and merciful to us when we do not deserve it.

He also reminds us that we should be careful about the judgments we make on others. The goal is to be generous; not only with our physical blessings, but also with our spiritual and emotional blessing we can give to others. We are promised that God will reward us generously.

What will happen if a blind man tries to guide another blind man? Both will not end up where they want to be and they could be injured. He uses this to show that if we are to guide others, we need to make sure our own life is in order. We must remove the glaring problems from our own lives in order to help others with their problems.

We will be known by our fruit. In winter or early spring, you could easily convince me that an apple tree was an orange tree. I can't really tell the difference. I do, however, know the difference between an apple and an orange. Once that tree produces fruit, I will know exactly what kind of tree it is and you will no longer be able to fool me. Our lives should be the same way. Our fruit (words, actions, behavior, reactions, etc.) will tell the world who we are. We might be able to fool them for a time, but our works will find us out.

What good does it do to call Jesus "Lord" and not do what He asks? Jesus says that person is like a man who builds a house on a foundation of sand. He is told it won't hold and to use rock, but does it anyway. Predictably, it collapses with the wind, rain and flooding. However, if he would take the advice of master builders and dig deep to build it on firm rock, it would withstand the wind, rain and flooding. Jesus, the master spiritual builder, has given us the

proper way to structure our spiritual house. If we choose not to follow His instructions or try our own way, predictably, it will collapse under the pressures of life. If we do follow His instructions, our spiritual life will be able to stand against the trials that come.

Comment:

Kimra Grantham Robinson:

Thanks! Nice to be reminded of our goals first thing in the morning.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, brother Doug!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Amen brother! Covenant confusion is the basis for most religious false teaching today!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! A lot of wonderful children songs ran through my mind while reading these passages tonight. One thing brought out at the study today is not allowing zeal to leave us. These passages are very familiar to us. May we always be zealous to read the Word. Tonight I give Christ honor and awe for the marvelous miracles He performed.

June 3: Luke 7-8 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for June 3, 2017

Luke 7-8

In Capernaum, some elders of the Jews approach Him on behalf of a centurion who had a dear servant who was sick. The first thing we learn is that he was concerned about a servant. This would not be typical behavior for a Roman soldier and tells us something about his character. Second, he believes Jesus has the ability to heal his servant. This is also not typical of a Roman soldier. Finally, we also find out that the Jewish leaders spoke highly of him. This would definitely not been true of your average Roman let alone a soldier. On their way to the centurion's home, other friends of the soldier arrive to express his belief that Jesus can heal his servant without actually being there. He gives the analogy of his own experience as a man in authority. If he wants a servant to do something, they do it. He believes that Jesus is similar, except that instead of having authority over physical servants, Jesus has authority over everything, even diseases. Jesus points out that He has not found that great of a faith, even among the Jews.

The next day, He sees a funeral procession that is carrying the dead only son of a widow. He has compassion on her and brings her son back to life in front of everyone. This creates quite a stir.

All of these events are reported to John the baptizer who sends servants to confirm that Jesus is the Messiah. They arrive to see many miracles by Jesus who tells them to tell John what they have seen. After they leave, Jesus tells the crowd about the importance of John's message.

While the people, even tax collectors, show their trust in God through the baptism of John, the Jewish leaders reject God and John's baptism.

Jesus compares the people to children that cannot decide what they want. One minute they want you to dance, the next they want you to cry. The Jewish leaders criticized John for being so cautious about what he ate or drank but they criticize Jesus for behaving more like them.

Jesus goes to a Pharisees house for a meal. A woman shows up and pours expensive oil on Jesus' feet after wiping them with her hair and tears. The Pharisee thinks to himself that if Jesus was really a prophet, He would know about the woman's past and tell her to leave Him alone. Jesus knows the Jews thoughts, so He tells them a parable about a creditor who had two men that owed him 500 denarii and 50 denarii respectively. The man forgives both of their debts. Jesus asks the Pharisee which of the debtors will love the creditor more? The Pharisee agrees that the one that owed more will appreciate the forgiveness more. Jesus explains that when He came in the house, the Pharisee did not even offer water for Him to wash His feet. This woman so appreciates His forgiveness, she was willing to wash His feet with her hair. Naturally, instead of learning the lesson intended, they question His ability to forgive sins. This leads me to two questions. First, how much did I owe that God forgives? Second, who is going to be most receptive to God's message of forgiveness?

We now find out that several women are making sure that Jesus and the twelve apostles have their physical needs taken care of while they are traveling. These include Mary Magdalene, who Jesus healed of seven demons, and Joanna, who was the wife of one of Herod's stewards. Under normal circumstances, these two women would have had nothing to do with each other. Jesus, and His purpose, bring them together.

When a large group of people gather to hear Him, He tells them a parable about a farmer that is spreading seed. Unfortunately, not all of it falls on good ground and is destroyed. What falls on good ground does grow and produce. His apostles want an explanation. Jesus explains the different soils as types of hearts that are hearing the word. We often make this about the seed we are sowing and where it lands, but perhaps more meaning for us is to ask what kind of soil are we?

Jesus then tells us not to hide our lives from the world. Instead, we should be bold about telling the world about our faith. He connects this with the previous parable by encouraging us to be careful about how we hear the word and what we do with it.

When Jesus' mother and brothers arrive, the crowd indicates their arrival. Jesus tells them that His family is not about physical relations, but about spiritual connections.

Jesus and the apostles get in a boat to cross the sea. After Jesus falls asleep, a storm comes up that threatens to sink the boat. The apostles become afraid and wake Him up. He is not concerned about the storm. He is concerned about their lack of faith. He stills the storm to increase their faith. Perhaps if we focused more on our faith, which comes through knowledge of the word of God, we would not be overly focused on the challenges we are facing.

In the area of the Gadarenes, Jesus encounters a man that is demon possessed. His state is so bad that he has no clothes and lives in the cemetery. The demons recognize Jesus immediately and beg Him not to torture or destroy them. Instead, they want Him to cast them into some swine. The swine run off a cliff and drown in a lake. The men that were feeding the swine, an interesting occupation for a Jew, run and tell everyone what happened. When the community comes to see Jesus, they also see the formerly demon possessed man clothed and calm. The people demand that Jesus leave the area. The formerly demon possessed man

wants to go with them, but Jesus tells him to go home and spread the word about what happened to him.

When Jesus returns to Galilee, He is welcomed with open arms. Even the ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, falls down at His feet asking Him to come to his house to heal his daughter. On the way, a woman with an unstoppable bleeding reaches out and touches His clothes. She is immediately healed and Jesus also immediately knows what happened. She is afraid that she will be in trouble, but Jesus is merciful to her and commends her faith.

While this is going on, someone from Jairus' house arrives to tell them that the girl has died. Jesus encourages them to believe instead of being afraid, telling them that she is not dead, just sleeping. The crowd scoffs at this idea, but Jesus goes in, takes her by the hand and raises her back to life. This made a big impression with Jairus, his wife and all the people.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:
Good words!

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:
I had several questions but now I can't remember all of them... So I'll ask the one I can for now
The demons who recognized Jesus asked Him not to torture or destroy them but instead cast them into the nearby swine. The swine ended up running off a cliff and drowned anyway. What am I missing here?

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:
I believe they wanted to avoid any retribution from Christ, which they knew He had the power to enforce. By being sent into the swine, they were saved that punishment but still released their hold on the man. I cannot answer the question about what happened to them after that.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Matthew 12:43-45 suggests to me that the demon(s)/evil spirit(s) have no interest in housing in animals, but they would do it temporarily to avoid what they perceived would be Jesus' treatment of them. So, there being no point in remaining in the swine, they quickly dispatched them to go on to other souls. These are just some thoughts. Hope they are helpful.

Comment:

Craig Hensley:
A good lesson. As far as the demon possessed man: what a blessing he was given. Through his death, Christ gave us a similar freedom:

Hebrews 2:14-15 (NIV)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug Twaddell! I'm fascinated by the two times the gospels mention Jesus was amazed. Here with the centurion and earlier in Nazareth at unbelief. May we reflect the centurion's belief!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Joanne Caffie, I think it is intriguing that demons can appeal to the Son of God for mercy under the Will of God and be heard. Justice and the purpose of God and the times established by the Father apply to all, even demons, and even the Son of God. Jesus had the power to torture them (as they had tortured their victim), but he did not, and had not come to do so. That thought reflects their character, in contrast to his. Nor had he come to execute judgment ahead of time. Even demons have their "rights" to face judgment as ordained at the proper time. So Jesus rescues the demon oppressed, but is not vindictive, does not violate the Father's order, and is in every way true to his purpose to seek and save the lost.

The swine "solution" was proposed by the demons, and was no solution at all, highlighting their folly. Jesus did not prevent them influencing the swine, and as Butch O'Neal observed that seemed to be a poor interface for them to make a satisfactory connection, and the swine went mad and drowns themselves. No net gain for the demons, but Jesus allowed them their plea. The contrast between the calm and sensible hostage set free and the insanity of the pigs highlights the contrast between the work of Jesus and that of the devil, and drives home the reality that while God watches over the sparrows (and pigs) one human is worth far more than many sparrows (or pigs).

Replies:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Charles!

June 10: Luke 9-10 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for June 10, 2017

Luke 9-10

Jesus sends His apostles out on their own. He gives them power over demons, to cure diseases, to heal the sick and to preach the kingdom of God. His specific instructions specify that they are to not take any provisions for the trip. This is a test of faith for both the apostles and those that believe their words. He also gives them permission to move on if the people in a certain area do not respond. He points out that this is a judgement against those people and not the apostles.

Herod begins to take note of the things that Jesus is doing. He is understandably confused and concerned. He knows that he had John the baptizer beheaded. Some believe that Jesus is John back from the dead. Others are convinced that He is Elijah. Because of these different

opinions and because of the amazing stories being told about Him, Herod is very interested in meeting Jesus.

When the apostles return, Jesus wants to take them off by themselves for a while. However, the crowds follow wanting to see miracles, be healed and hear more teachings. Toward the end of the day, Jesus asks the apostles to give them some food. The problem is that they only have 5 loaves and two fish. They know that is not nearly enough for the crowd which has about 5000 men, not to mention women and children. Jesus blesses the food and they are able to feed everyone and collect twelve baskets of leftovers.

When Jesus is finally alone with His apostles, He asks them who people are saying that he is. They tell Him that some say John the Baptist but some Elijah or one of the other prophets who had come back from the dead. What Jesus really wants to talk about is who the apostles think He is. Peter speaks up with the correct answer. Jesus reminds them that He must suffer many things because the Jewish leadership would reject Him.

Jesus also tells them that following Him has a great cost. His followers must give up their own will and accept God's will for their lives. Jesus gave us the greatest example by giving up (temporarily) His position in heaven to accept the will of the Father.

About eight days later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a mountain where His appearance is transformed right in front of them and Moses and Elijah appear. Peter suggests that they build three monuments to them, but he is interrupted when a cloud surrounds them and God speaks from the cloud.

As Jesus is teaching the next day, a man begs Jesus to cast a demon out of his son. He had asked the apostles to do it, but they could not. Jesus expresses frustration with them and then sends the demon away. When everyone is amazed, He tells His apostles that He will be betrayed. They don't understand what Jesus meant and are afraid to ask.

They begin arguing among themselves who would be the greatest. Jesus presents a child to them as an example of the humility they need to learn. John comments that they saw someone casting out demons in Jesus name and told him to stop. To their surprise, Jesus tells them to leave him alone. Their pride was causing them to think that they were better than others.

Jesus begins to focus on getting back to Jerusalem. On the way, He goes through a town in Samaria. They are not happy because Jesus isn't staying long. James and John want to call fire from heaven like Elijah did with the prophets of Baal. Jesus chastises them by reminding them that their purpose is to save lives, not destroy them.

Someone boldly tells Jesus they will follow Him anywhere. Jesus reminds him that He is homeless. When He calls someone else to follow Him, they want to bury their father first. Jesus tells them to get their priorities straight. Another person wants to see their family one more time. Jesus tells them that looking to the past is no way to prepare for the future.

Jesus appoints seventy others and sends them in pairs to prepare towns for His arrival. He gives them similar instructions that He gave the apostles earlier. He also tells them to eat what is put before them (sound familiar parents), heal the sick and preach the kingdom. He hints that it will not be easy by telling them they will be sheep among wolves. If a town refuses them, He compares that city to Sodom. He points out some specific towns that had already rejected Him and says that if Tyre and Sidon had seen the same miracle, they would have repented. If we reject those preaching Jesus, we are rejecting Jesus. If we reject Jesus, we are rejecting the Father.

The seventy come back and are amazed that even the demons were subject to them. Jesus points out that He saw the fall of Satan, indicating His preeminence over him, and He gave a portion of that authority to them. He reminds them that they should not celebrate the power given to them. Instead, they should celebrate the mercy shown them.

Jesus thanks the Father for giving Him teachings that can be understood in their simplicity but can confound those that are not honestly seeking the truth. He then addresses His followers with the realization that they are seeing things and understanding things that the prophets and fathers of old wanted to experience and know.

A lawyer has a question for Jesus. He asks, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asks the man to answer his own question. The man quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Jesus simply agrees with him. The lawyer should have stopped there. However, he asks a follow-up question, "Who is my neighbor?" His only reason for asking this was to make himself feel better. We can fall into this same trap if we are not careful. We can attempt to find a justification for our behavior instead of following an obvious truth. Jesus decides to answer this question with a hypothetical scenario. A Jew is mugged and left for dead on a road. A priest and a Levite each refuse to help. A Samaritan, who the Jew would probably not have helped, renders aid at a great cost. Jesus wants to know which of the three was a neighbor to the unfortunate man. The lawyer obviously knows that it was the Samaritan. Jesus tells him to do the same.

Jesus finds Himself at Mary and Martha's house. Mary is listening intently to Jesus teach. Martha is busy with preparing a meal. When Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her, Jesus has an interesting answer. He acknowledges that Martha is worried about many things (and does not discourage her from those), but He also commends Mary for her choice to listen to His teachings. He tells Martha that Mary has chosen something good that can never be taken away. If we are so busy with too many things (even if they are good deeds or causes) that those become our focus instead of learning the teachings of God, we are in danger of emphasizing something that can draw us away.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thanks, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thank you, Doug Twaddell! So many good lessons in these two chapters. I was reminded of the 70/72 (manuscripts conflict on #). Glad Luke records this. Two by two - a practice continued in the early church. Today I'm thankful we have two witnesses sent out to the Philippine brethren . 😊 May we praise God for revealing the Word despite language barriers. And may they return with joy!

June 17: Luke 11-12 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 6-17-2017

Luke 11-12

Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them to pray. Jesus gives them an example prayer. Jesus is not giving them a series of words that are to be used as the perfect prayer. He is showing them concepts that they can include their personal prayers.

Jesus includes a parable that depicts a man that has a traveler that arrives late in the night. Needing to feed him, he knocks on another friend's door to ask for some bread. Jesus admits that the door may not be opened the first time. If the man persists, the door will eventually be opened. Jesus uses this to encourage us to persistently ask God for the things we need. He emphasized the teaching by pointing out that if imperfect human fathers know how to give their children good things, how much better will God be at knowing what is best for us.

Luke also takes time to point out that Jesus casts out a demon that could not speak. Afterward, some of those watching begin to reason that He is casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus counters this with 3 points. First, why would Satan harm his own efforts to influence humans? Second, if only Satan can cast out demons, by what power are those who the Jewish leaders accept casting out demons? Finally, if Jesus is casting out demons, it proves that He has more power than Satan who is giving power to the demons.

Jesus also points out that when He frees someone from a demon, they are not automatically in the clear. If the demon leaves and the victim does not successfully fill the emptied area of their being with something good, the demon will return, with friends, and torment the person even more than they did before. This should also serve as a warning for Jesus' followers (us). When we overcome a temptation or sin, if we don't replace that part of our lives with something acceptable to God, we can more easily fall back into the same issue later.

When some near Jesus begin praising His mother, Mary, as blessed, Jesus takes no time to change the blessing to those that hear Him and obey Him. More than once Jesus does not allow over-praising of Mary. Interesting considering much of the religious world today spends so much time honoring, praising and praying to her. Jesus is not pleased.

Jesus recalls the account of the prophet Jonah. He tells the people that He will offer them the sign of Jonah. Just like Jonah called the city of Nineveh to repent, Jesus is calling people to repent. He also points out two cases of judgement against the Jews as a nation. First, the queen of the south (probably Sheba) recognized the wisdom of Solomon, but many do not recognize the greater wisdom of Christ. Second, Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah but many are refusing to repent at the preaching of Jesus who is greater than Jonah.

Jesus makes some references to light. A light should be placed where it can be useful. Like many other times, light here symbolically represents truth. If our spiritual eyes are good and opened wide, then plenty of spiritual truth is able to enter our lives. If our spiritual eyes are closed or not working correctly, then very little or no spiritual truth can enter our lives. We also must be careful that we do not mistake lies for the truth (darkness for light).

At this point a Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner. Jesus does not wash His hands according to the traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus makes a point about this when the man inwardly questions this. He warns us about being more concerned about keeping up appearances and not ensuring purity throughout our lives. When the lawyers take offense because they feel Jesus is implicating them, He addresses them with the same concerns. At this point, all the Jewish religious leaders begin to ask questions designed to trick Jesus into saying something they can use against Him.

During all this, a large crowd begins to gather. Jesus addresses His disciples by telling them that they must avoid the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. We should not fear those who can harm us physically. We should fear God, who will make the determination of our eternal destination.

That determination will be based on our actions during our lives here. If we honor Christ, God will give us honor in the judgement.

Someone in the crowd asks Jesus to confront his brother about a disputed inheritance. Instead of issuing a ruling, Jesus warns about the dangers of covetousness and trusting in physical wealth. He tells a parable about a farmer who brings in a bumper crop. The man decides to tear down his existing barns and build bigger barns and then he will sit back and enjoy his wealth. God informs him that his life is over and asks the question, "Whose will all these things be?" Instead of focusing on physical wealth, we should focus on spiritual riches.

Jesus then reminds His disciples (us) that they should not be overly concerned about their physical issues. We should do our best to be good stewards of what God has provided, but worrying about it will not accomplish anything positive. What we are the most concerned about is a telltale sign of what we deem the most important in our lives.

Jesus now talks addresses being a good steward. A good servant will always be prepared for the master to return. An evil servant not be prepared for the master or a thief. Jesus expects us to always be ready for His return.

Jesus talks about a fire that He will bring to the earth that He wishes was already burning. Unfortunately, he reminds them, He has a difficult trial to go through first. When that fire is brought, it will divide people, even families. No doubt this is what has happened. The world, even families, are divided on their belief or unbelief in Him.

Jesus reminds us that we as humans are able to discern what will happen with the weather and prepare for it, but do not often prepare for things that are much more important. He points out that instead of going before a judge to resolve a disagreement, we should do everything we can to settle the matter before it gets that far. The judge may decide against us. The saying I have heard is this: "Most people plan more for a week-long vacation than they do for their eternal life."

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thanks, brother Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
So many good lessons you've highlighted from these chapters. Thanks Doug Twaddell

June 24: Luke 13-14 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for June 24, 2017

Luke 13-14

Luke records Jesus' response to an incident with Pilate and some Galileans. Somehow he mixed their blood with a sacrifice. None of the other Gospel writers mention this and no obvious record can be found in any of the early church writings. This leads to many suppositions about what Luke is referring to. While I may not know the exact details of this event or the tower of Siloam mentioned next, I still believe it happened. Jesus wants those listening to think about whether this happened because they were worse sinners than other

people in Jerusalem. This is important because they definitely tended to believe that if something bad happened to you, it must be because you have angered God in some way. We, too, must fight against this concept. It is so easy to look at someone's misfortune (or our own) and take this same logic path.

While He is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, a woman is there who could not stand up straight. Jesus heals her. Naturally, the Jewish leaders are not happy. Jesus points out that even they will do necessary work on the Sabbath, like caring for their animals. Surely the health of the woman was more important than a drink for an ox.

Jesus compares the kingdom to a mustard seed and leaven. One is small and grows into a large tree. The other is small but can influence large amount of dough. We have a saying, "Dynamite comes in small packages." The teachings of Christ have the ability to do tremendous things in our lives and can influence many people through even one individual.

When someone asks if only a few will be saved, Jesus acknowledges that it is a narrow gate. He emphasizes the point by telling them that many will think that they are going to be allowed to enter, but will be denied.

In a turn of events, the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill Him. Jesus is not concerned. He not only wants to get to Jerusalem to fulfill the prophecies about His death, He laments about how much He would love to comfort and protect the people, but they will not allow Him.

Once again Jesus is in the house of a Pharisee on the Sabbath and once again a man with a handicap is present. Naturally, Jesus is going to heal him, but this time He takes the initiative by asking if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. When they refuse to answer Him, He heals the man and reminds them that they would help one of their animals that were in trouble, even if it on the Sabbath.

As Jesus watches them jockey for the most favored seats at the dinner, He gives them some advice. When they force themselves into the best seats, the host then must embarrass them to direct them to their proper seat which is in a lower position. Instead, He says they should go sit in the worst possible seat so that the host can, in front of everyone, move them up to a more important place. He also tells the host that instead of inviting their rich and powerful friends to the dinner so they can return the favor, he should invite those that are poor or unfortunate even though they could never return the favor. To emphasize this teaching, Jesus then tells a parable about a man that plans a great supper. When he lets those invited know that it is ready, they all have different excuses why they cannot attend. The man tells the servant to bring in the poor, maimed, lame and blind to eat the supper.

Jesus also teaches that there is a cost to following Him and we should consider that before committing to it. When we consider the cost, though, we also should consider the consequences of refusing. When put on the balance scales, Paul tells us that the eternal weight of glory far exceeds the light affliction we must endure now. (2 Cor 4:17)

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you brother! I sure do appreciate Jesus!

Comment:

Debbie Bolinger:

Amen!! I do too appreciate what Jesus has done for us everyday!! 😊😊😊

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug! Ditto what Steven and Debbie said!!!! :D

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

And ditto what Butch said! Thank you. Job's friends certainly had the mindset that Job must have sinned because of the misfortune that befell him. As you say, we have the same mindset today. Those who prosper must be more beloved by God than those who struggle in poverty. The Pharisees were all about the rules and prided themselves on observing them at the cost of understanding the spirit behind those rules. Do we tend to do likewise - putting too much emphasis on following church traditions rather than the spirit? (i.e. 1 cup churches vs individual cup, greet each other with a holy kiss vs. not)

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! To the best of my knowledge there are 7 recorded miracles on the Sabbath. This would be a good short lesson/topic for a young man to deliver to a congregation.

July 1: Luke 15-16 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 7-1-17

Luke 15-16

When the religious leadership again complains that Jesus is spending time with sinners, He confronts them with a series of scenarios. If a man has 100 sheep and only 99 are accounted for, he will make it a priority to find that lost sheep. When he does, it will be a joyous celebration. The same thing occurs in heaven when a sinner repents and turns back to God. If a woman has 10 silver coins and loses one, she will search everywhere until she finds it. When she does, she will call her neighbors to celebrate with her. All of God's angels rejoice when a sinner is saved through obedient belief.

He emphasizes these concepts with a longer parable about a man that had two sons. The younger son decided he wanted his inheritance early so he could try and make his own way. The father gives it to him, but the young man recklessly spends all of it and now has nothing. He is finally relegated to taking care of pigs (a humiliating experience for a Jew) and actually considers eating the slop that he is giving them (not very appetizing). When he comes to himself and realizes his position, he decides to return home. He does not feel worthy to return as a son, so he hopes that his father will at least hire him as one of the servants. To his surprise, the father celebrates the return of his son with a feast. This does not sit well with the older son who had not squandered his inheritance but had been working diligently for his father. The father points out to the older son that he loves both of them. Since he stayed, he will have all that the father has. However, it is right to celebrate the return of the son that left.

The father explains feeling as if the younger son had died and was now brought back to life. This must be how God views us when we stray away from Him and then return. No wonder the angels rejoice.

Jesus gives an odd parable about a man who manages the business affairs of a rich man. When he is accused of mishandling his responsibilities, the rich man tells him to put everything in order and leave. The manager is not sure what to do. He does not want to do physical labor, but he does not want to beg, either. He devises a plan that will put him in the good graces of the other rich men his master does business with. To do this, he goes to everyone that owes his master money or goods and discounts what they owe if they will pay it immediately. His master is impressed with this shrewd financial maneuver. We are similar in that we are only managers of our physical wealth, we do not own it and one day it will be taken away. While we have access to it, we should use it to place ourselves in a position to receive spiritual blessings. Those that are faithful with a little that is not their own will be given much that will be their own. We cannot serve both the physical and the spiritual. At some point they will be in conflict and we will be forced to choose.

When the Pharisees, who loved their riches, made light of this, Jesus condemned them for wanting to appear Godly without actually changing their hearts.

Luke records a brief statement about divorce from Jesus. If this is taken by itself, it would appear that if a man remarries after a divorce it is adultery and any man that marries a divorced woman commits adultery. However, we must take this in concert with other records of Jesus' teachings as well as instructions from the apostles that give further insight and explanation. God hates divorce. That is a fact that He makes abundantly clear. In our time, we can surely see why this is. We also must realize, though, that divorce is not an unforgivable sin. We can be forgiven and God will remember it no more. We must also recognize that all sin carries with it consequences. Even when we are forgiven, the consequences may remain and we must accept those with humility, patience and understanding.

Jesus now gives a parable about two men. One is rich and the other, Lazarus, is a beggar that is desperately sick and hungry. All he wants is some crumbs from the rich man. When they both die, Lazarus is depicted as being carried to the bosom of Abraham (a place of comfort) while the rich man is depicted as being buried but nothing else. The rich man finds himself being tormented and can see Lazarus in the distance at peace. He begs Abraham to let Lazarus put a drop of water on his tongue. It would appear that the rich man has become the beggar. When the request is denied, the rich man changes his focus and wants Lazarus to be sent back to warn his brothers. He realizes that they are headed for the same place he is and that is something he would like to prevent. Abraham tells him that they have all the information they need to change their lives. The rich man knows they will not listen to the prophets but argues that if someone raised from the dead, that would get their attention. Abraham points out the reality that if they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen even if someone did rise from the dead. Remember, Jesus is telling this to people that will be witnesses of Him rising from the dead and knows that some will listen but most will not.

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Amen!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, brother Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Doug! It's a great blessing to be with you and other brethren this week. ❤️ I'm so grateful for everyone's faithfulness to the study. It brings great joy! One takeaway I have from today's study is a reminder that, "what is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight." And the crumbs from the table of our Lord is so much more than we deserve. How blessed we are that He has great compassion on us!

July 8: Luke 17-18 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 7-8-17

Luke 17-18

Jesus begins with the reality that, even between brethren, issues will arise. The solution for these issues is communication and forgiveness. Even if the offense seems to keep repeating because they are having difficulty changing the behavior, we are to forgive them repeatedly. The apostles, realizing the difficulty of this, ask Jesus to increase their faith. His response to that request is twofold. First, if you have enough faith, you can deal with any situation or difficulty that will come along. Second, if the master tells the servant to do something, there is no expectation for the master to thank him. He has simply done what was he was told. Jesus, as our master, has given us instructions. While we are to do those, He also expects us to go above and beyond the expectations. If we only do what is minimally required, we are unprofitable servants. In Matthew 25:30, Jesus says they will be cast into outer darkness.

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters 10 men afflicted with leprosy. When they beg Him for mercy, He tells them to show themselves to the priest. This was how the Law of Moses instructed to determine if a person was still leprous or was cured. The vast majority of Jesus' healings have an immediate effect on the one that is healed. This time it appears that the healing was either gradual or happened away from Him as they went to see the priest. When they realized they are healed, only one of the men immediately returns to Jesus. He falls down on his face and glorified God and gave thanks to Jesus. I may be reading too much into this, but it seems to me the man knew that the healing was from God (giving Him glory for the source of the healing) and that Jesus was the giver of that power (giving Him thanks for the healing). Even if that is not the case, the man recognized the connection between Jesus and the Father and praised both. Jesus commends him for his faith.

When the Pharisees ask about the timing of the coming kingdom, Jesus assures them that it is not something that you can observe with the physical senses. He asserts that the kingdom will be internal in each individual. He follows this with a discussion for His disciples. He warns them that some will try to pinpoint the time and place of the coming kingdom, but not to listen to them. It is at this point that we can see that Jesus is speaking of His final appearing in judgement. It will come as fast as the lightning moves across the sky. People will be going about their regular day and making plans for the future, just like in the days of Noah before the flood. He mentions that the people of Sodom were preparing for the future, not the end, when God destroyed the city. Jesus reminds them of Lot's wife, who could not help but turn and look to see what was happening to their possessions and friends. We should not care about the world's riches, but instead look toward eternity.

Jesus gives a couple of statements that have been misunderstood by many. In 17:35-36, Jesus says that some will be taken and the others left. Many have understood this as "left behind." The Greek word (Strong's #G863) does not mean just that. It also includes the idea of

being sent away, yielded up, let go, not to keep, etc. Instead of “left behind,” a better understanding would be “left out.” When contrasted with the word “taken” (strongs #G3880), which means to take with one’s self, to join with one’s self, to receive something. Jesus is describing some people being taken with Him and some being left out. This is consistent with Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where he describes those believers that are alive being “caught up with Him (Jesus) in the air.” Those that are left out will be the goats described by Jesus in Matthew 25 that are “sent away” to destruction and “left out” of paradise.

Jesus tells them a parable to encourage them to pray and not give up. A widow that cannot seem to get justice continually brings her case before a judge that is described as unjust. Even the unjust judge eventually grants the woman’s petition in order to keep her from coming back. God is not an unjust judge. He will avenge His people.

When he noticed that some were thinking of themselves as righteous and others as sinners, He told a parable about a Pharisee that went to the temple to pray. He used his prayer to remind God how good he was, of the good deeds he did and thanked God that he was not like other men, especially the tax collector that was nearby. Meanwhile, the tax collector used his prayer to beg God for mercy because he knew he was not worthy of God’s grace. Jesus tells them that the tax collector was justified, because he humbled himself before God, and the Pharisee was not, because he lifted himself up before God.

When two infants are brought to Him, the disciples try to keep them away. Jesus uses them as an object lesson. He points out that we adults must believe in the kingdom of God as a little child believes the things a parent tells them, even though they might not fully understand. This is faith.

A ruler approaches Jesus to ask what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus reminds him of the commandments from the Law of Moses, which the man says he has kept his whole life. Jesus informs him that there is one more thing that he should do. He tells him to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor. Because he loved his riches, he seemed unable to do this. Again, Jesus uses this as an object lesson. He points out that it is difficult for a rich person to not trust in his riches but instead trust in God, thus making it difficult for him to enter the kingdom. Since the Jews understood that riches were a sign of God’s favor, they question whether anyone can be saved. Jesus assures them that with God, all things are possible.

Peter, never one to hold back, points out that they, the apostles, had left all to follow Him. Jesus assures them that there is a great reward for those that are willing to leave material riches behind for Him.

Jesus now takes them aside and tells them what will happen after they arrive in Jerusalem. He reminds them that all the things that will happen were spoken of by the prophets. He included the humiliation He would endure, the physical scourging He would suffer and His resurrection on the third day. Unfortunately, they did not understand any of these things.

As they approach Jericho, Jesus heals a blind man named Bartimaeus. As the man follows Jesus, he glorifies God and all the people that knew him glorified God, too.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Great study, Doug! I sincerely appreciate your notes on these two chapters. On the 2nd coming - days of Noah/Lot - I was focusing more on how disobedient the world was during those days & will be at His return. I think I was missing the point. The two thoughts go hand in hand but I agree it's referencing that people will be going about planning for today/future rather than

looking toward eternal life. Just this week Steven referenced Lot's wife in a comment and Tad Morris shared a good story on teaching Nate. We are to remember Lot's wife & be prepared to leave this world without looking back. Fix your eyes on Jesus! Another take-away is Jesus with the little children. It's the first I realized He was holding babies. Finally, I so appreciate the 1 leper and Bartimaeus' example of thanksgiving. "Your faith has made you well," had immediate physical benefits but also renders a more important healing of eternal salvation, praise be to Christ. Thanks again, Doug, for all that you've taught in the name of Jesus Christ!

Comment:

Lori Watt:

I would appreciate some thoughts on 18:19... this statement of Jesus has seemed strange to me. How is He not good?

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Did he say, "I'm not good?"

Luke 18:19 (NIV)

19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.

There is no assertion of Jesus not being good. The assertion is that only God is good. So, why did the man call Jesus good? Did he think Jesus was God? Since I do believe Jesus is God, I have an answer to the question, of why I would call Jesus good.

Folks ought to think of such things when they call men "reverend" and similar language. Is he God? If he is, then okay, otherwise, why?

Replies:

Lori Watt:

Thanks, Charles!

Denise Waits:

Thank you for clearing that up. :)

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:

Amen.

July 15: Luke 19-20 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 7-15-17

Luke 19-20

As Jesus travels through Jericho, He sees a man up in a tree. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector who was too short to see over the crowds. Jesus makes the decision to go to his house. Some that saw Him begin to complain. When Zacchaeus explains the charitable giving that he does and promises to pay back four times over anything he has taken dishonestly. Jesus grants salvation for his dutiful following of the law.

He offers another parable when some are misunderstanding the nature and timing of the kingdom. A nobleman gives 10 of his servant's one mina each. When the master returns, some of the servants have increased their mina many times over. However, one servant simply hid his so it could be returned. The mina is taken from the servant and given to another. The lesson is that we are to be good stewards of what God gives us. If we are not, what we have will be taken away.

When Jesus arrives at Mount Olivet near Jerusalem, He sends two of His disciples into town find a certain donkey colt. They bring it to Him and He rides it into the city. Multitudes meet Him calling out praises to Him and spreading our clothes on the ground.

Jesus enters the temple grounds and drives out those that are taking advantage of the poor that need to exchange Roman money for coins acceptable to the Temple or to buy a sacrifice. Jesus continued to go to the Temple every day to teach and the Jewish religious leadership began planning how to kill Him.

One day in the Temple, they approach him wanting to know what authority He had to do these things. He asks them a question in return. "Was John's baptism from God or men?" They cannot answer the question. If they say "from God," the follow up question will be, "Why didn't you believe him?" If they say from men, the mass of people that believed John to be from God will revolt. So they simply say, "We don't know." Jesus informs them that He will not tell them where His authority is from, then.

Instead, He tells them a parable. A man planted a vineyard and went away, leaving it to hired vinedressers. When the time for harvest arrived, he sent a servant to collect what was his. The vinedressers beat him and sent him away. This happens two more times. The owner then sends his son thinking that the vinedressers will respect him. They kill the son hoping that they will be able to keep the inheritance. There is no doubt that this was meant to indict the Jewish leadership as the vinedressers. God had sent many to them and they mistreated and killed them. Now God sent His Son and they are going to be filled with pride and desire for power that will lead them to kill Him.

At this point, the Jewish leadership has had enough. They begin to attempt to infiltrate Jesus' followers with the goal of catching Him saying something that they can take to the Romans as an accusation. One of the questions they ask is whether it is lawful to pay taxes to the Roman government. Jesus asks them whose image is on the tax money. It is Caesar's. Jesus instructs them to give to Caesar what is his and give to God what is His. No matter how hard they tried, they could not get Him to say anything punishable by the Romans.

The Sadducees approach Jesus with a question about who someone would be married to after the resurrection. Jesus assures them that there is no marriage in the resurrection. This is interesting because they did not even believe in a resurrection. Because of that, Jesus takes the lesson a step farther. He informs them that even Moses believed in a resurrection. At the burning bush, God said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." He said this using the present tense. Obviously God recognizes that even though they are physically dead, they live on spiritually.

Jesus brings up a point for the scribes to consider. They knew and taught that the Christ would be the son of David. However, David wrote about the Christ being his Lord (master). Why did David call one of his sons (descendants) Lord? Jesus then warns the people to watch out for the scribes. He explains that they love to look very religious and have the honor and praise that comes with being a leader, but they do it all for show. This should also be taken as a warning for us both to look out for people like that, but also to make every effort not to become like them.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thanks, Doug!

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:
Thank you.

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:
Thanks Doug. We've heard the phrase over & over again "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob" but I never thought of God's use of this phrase to be in the present tense.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
Comments on Luke 20:18? I've always read the first and last halves of this verse to both be negative towards those that reject Jesus. Tonight for some reason I read it differently in my mind. In light of Ezekiel talking about removing/breaking my heart of stone could perhaps the first half of this verse maybe refer to my old life being shattered on the Rock of Christ and being made into a new creation? Tonight this verse reminded me of the chorus of a song in the blue book.

PICK UP THE BROKEN PIECES AND BRING THEM TO THE LORD
PICK UP THE BROKEN PIECES TRUST IN HIS HOLY WORD
HE WILL PUT YOU BACK TOGETHER AND MAKE YOUR LIFE COMPLETE
JUST PLACE THE BROKEN PIECES AT THE SAVIORS FEET.

Replies:

Charles Fry:
I've never thought of that passage that way, but it is Biblical truth that some things (including our sinful, prideful self) have to be broken to come to the Lord. <http://www.livwat.com/articles/10013.html>

Doug Twaddell:
When I look at the Greek for "fall" in that verse, the majority of the uses are centered around the idea of falling from prosperity or falling prostrate in homage. We could look at it as our choice to humble ourselves willingly before Christ or He will humble us (all will kneel before Him).

Also, the Greek translated broken means exactly that. When we humble ourselves before Christ, we allow ourselves to be broken so that he can reshape our lives. That song is a great reminder of that process. However, at the end of the verse, the words "grind" and "powder" (KJV) are the same Greek word that can describe the process of winnowing the chaff to separate the grain. Jesus very well may have been connecting the concept of judgement harvest that He uses other places. If we don't choose to willingly break ourselves on Him, He will separate us like chaff from wheat which is good for nothing and is thrown into the fire.

Marc Hermon:
nice article Charles Fry

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! Also praising God for granting you good health these past 3 weeks during 2 VBS and the Midwest Bible Campout. I love the story of Zacchaeus. He's an example of one who walks in footsteps of Abraham's faith.

July 22: Luke 21-22 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 7-22-17

Luke 21-22

As Jesus watches people bring money as a gift to God, He uses the occasion to point out an example of how God and man think differently. Man sees a gift, especially money, and gives it importance and value based on the monetary amount. God sees a gift, any gift, and gives it importance and value based on the obedience to Him first and the degree of the sacrifice for the individual second. The size of the monetary value is not important to Him. We must keep this in mind. We often devalue our own talents and gifts because we look at them in terms of human value instead of Godly value.

Jesus, as others point out the beauty and majesty of the Temple, tells them that a day is coming that it will sit in ruins. Naturally, they want to know when this will happen and how they can know it will happen before hand. Jesus begins by telling them not to follow those that come along claiming to be Him and not to panic when they see tragedies and wars occur. All of these things, both natural and man-caused, will always continue. He warns them that persecutions will be brought against them, but they are not to be feared. Instead, they should understand that they will be opportunities for them to spread the Gospel. He also tells them that some of them will suffer to the point of death. Again, they are not to let this deter them. No amount of persecution, even death, can cause them to lose their soul if they remain faithful through patience.

Jesus tells them that when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, they are to leave immediately. This is when not only the destruction of the Temple will occur, but also great loss of life as God allows the Gentiles to take over the promised land because of Israel's unfaithfulness.

After all of these things, Jesus says that then they can begin to look for the second coming. Even though they wanted specific details and signs, Jesus provides them only with general statements that, as with most prophecies before they are fulfilled, can be interpreted many different ways. However, these statements cannot be taken out of context or seen as contradictory to other teachings from God's word about the second coming. We know that it will happen as fast as the lightning moves across the sky and that everyone will be going about their normal business, just like in the days of Noah.

Jesus now tells them a parable. He tells them that just like they can look at trees to see when the seasons are about to change, they will be able to know when the kingdom is near. He also assures them that it will arrive during this generation. Since Jesus has not returned, we must look at another kingdom that came during that time span. This would fit with the coming of the Church. However, it is also possible that when Jesus referred to "this generation," he was not speaking of a short generation of people, but the longer time frame of the generation after the Law of Moses which would include us. If that is the case, He could be speaking of the judgement day.

Either way, Jesus closes by reminding them not to get so caught up in this physical life that we that we are not ready spiritually for the judgement. We should always be watching, always be ready and always be praying as that day comes closer.

We now see Jesus preparing with His apostles to eat the Passover as the Jewish religious leaders try to determine the best way to have Him killed. They find their man with Judas, as he decides to betray Jesus for money. Jesus tells His apostles that they will find a room in Jerusalem where the owner will allow them to gather. Jesus expresses how much he has wanted to eat this with them. It is an interesting statement because Jesus knows that this will be His last meal before His death. This is the expression of how much He has wanted to reach this point in His obedience to the Father. This is the culmination of all the Fathers planning, the Holy Spirits power and the Sons efforts. We should understand from this the depth of His love, dedication and faithfulness toward us.

At the end of the meal, Jesus explains how He wants His followers to remember His sacrifice. He also points out that one of them will betray Him.

Once again, Jesus must deal with their inability to understand that serving others is more important than seeking glory for themselves.

Jesus also informs Peter that He will betray Him. Peter, as he usually did, fervently disagrees. Jesus assures him that he will and gives him a sign so he will know when it has happened. Jesus also tells them that they will no need to prepare themselves so they can continue after He is gone. Instead of trying to understand what Jesus is speaking of, they point out that there are two swords and surely that will be enough. They miss His point entirely.

They go to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus prays and warns them to stay alert. While there, Judas arrives with the Jewish leadership in tow. After he points out Christ, Peter wields his sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priests servant. Jesus heals the man and tells Peter that this is what is supposed to happen.

When they take Jesus away, Peter follows to see what will happen. Over a span of a little more than an hour, Peter denies knowing Jesus 3 times. As the rooster crows, Jesus looks at Peter. I can only imagine the emotions that were contained in that look (betrayal, disappointment, loneliness, pain, perhaps a little "I told you so," "Do you believe me now?") After this, Peter remembers Jesus' prediction and leaves the area crushed.

Jesus is now mocked, beaten, blindfolded and smacked in the face. The council prods Him with questions about whether He is the Christ. Jesus points out to them that not only will they not believe Him, nothing He says will compel them to release Him. When they ask Him if He is the Son of God, He admits that He is. At this point, they feel they have enough evidence to convict Him of blaaphemy.

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:

The recounting of this story always brings the sadness and the reality that had to prevail; God's will.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, brother Doug!

Comment:

Janet Gordon Gentry:

I always enjoy hearing your perspective and recounting of the scriptures! Great thoughts. Thanks!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Luke's account always pricks my heart and gives me chills. I also appreciate your thoughts for these passages Doug. Paragraph 1 would make a good collection table talk.

July 29: Luke 23-24 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 7-29-17

Luke 23-24

Jesus is taken to Pilate and falsely accused of teaching that the Jews should not pay taxes to the Roman government. Jesus acknowledges to Pilate that He is the King of the Jews, yet Pilate can find no legitimate reason that Jesus should be killed. When Pilate realizes that Jesus is from Galilee, He decides to send Him to Herod, who is governing that area for Rome.

Herod is excited to see Jesus. He has heard of the miracles being performed and is hoping to see one for himself. Jesus, however, knows that Herod does not have the authority of Pilate. Jesus has the goal of being condemned to crucifixion and Pilate, not Herod, can do that. When Jesus refuses to entertain Herod, He is sent back to Pilate.

Pilate consults with the Jewish leaders to tell them that, since he has found nothing worthy of a death sentence, he is going to chastise Jesus and let Him go. This would be part of the tradition of pardoning a prisoner at the time of Passover. The Jews insist that Barabbas, convicted of murder and rebellion, should be the prisoner who is released. Pilate consents and condemns Jesus to death.

As Jesus is taken to be crucified, they force Simon to carry the crossbeam. A very large crowd follows Him with the women mourning and lamenting His fate. Jesus tells them not to weep for Him, but for themselves. The situation is about to become difficult for those that follow Him. Jesus points out that if they, His opponents, are not afraid to strike against Jesus, they will be even more emboldened to strike against His followers when He is gone.

As Jesus is crucified with two criminals, He asks God to forgive those that are involved. Jesus offers mercy and forgiveness to those that are harming Him. Even after this, they continue to mock and insult Him. Even one of the criminals joins in. The other criminal recognizes his sin and that his punishment is justified. He also realizes that Jesus has not done anything wrong and knows something about the His connection to God and a coming kingdom. He asks Jesus to remember Him. Jesus offers him forgiveness and mercy. Much has been made of this event with some trying to connect it with salvation in our time. What must be understood is that our salvation through baptism (death, burial and resurrection of Christ) was not available to this man. Also, Jesus had, on many other occasions, forgiven the sins of an individual. He had the power and authority from God to do this. The only connection to our salvation today, is that Jesus is the author and mediator of both.

As various signs appear, Jesus physically dies. One of the Roman soldiers comes to the conclusion that Jesus was a righteous man. As most of the crowd disperses, His followers continue to monitor Jesus' body. A member of the council, Joseph from Arimathea, formally asks Pilate for permission to take the body of Jesus. He takes Jesus down from the cross and gives Him a formal burial in a new tomb. Again, the women continue to monitor all of these actions and make note of where the tomb is. They return with more spices for the body and then rest on the Sabbath.

On Sunday, the first day of the week, the women return with more spices. They are shocked when they find that the tomb has been opened and Jesus' body is not there. Two angels that appear as men tell them that Jesus has risen from the dead. When they tell the apostles, they don't believe them. When Peter goes to the tomb, he is amazed at what had happened.

That day, two men are going home to Emmaus. They are discussing all the things that had happened in Jerusalem. Jesus joins them and their conversation, but does not allow Himself to be known to them. When Jesus asks them about what happened, they tell Him the entire account. They call Jesus a prophet, but admit that they were "hoping" that He would redeem Israel. They also admit that they are not sure what to make of the story about the tomb being empty. Jesus begins with Moses and explains everything about the Messiah. When they get to Emmaus, they offer a place for Jesus to stay for the night. As they sit down to eat, Jesus takes bread and blesses it before He divides it up. They immediately know who He is, but then He vanishes from their sight. The men leave immediately to return to Jerusalem to tell their account of seeing Christ and find He appeared to Peter, too. While they are discussing these things, Jesus appears to them. When they think He must be a spirit (ghost), He tells them to touch Him and prove to themselves that He is real. To increase their belief, he eats food in their presence.

Luke now records Jesus giving some final instructions to His apostles. He reminds them that all the Old Testament prophecies about Him were fulfilled. He then gives them a miraculous understanding of those prophecies. He tells them that they will be preaching repentance and remission of sins starting at Jerusalem. He also instructs them to stay in Jerusalem until they receive power from God. This happens on the day of Pentecost.

Jesus takes them to Bethany. As He is blessing them, He is carried up into the heavens. They worship Him and then go back to Jerusalem where they go regularly to the Temple to praise God.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! Most important history we will ever read. Praise God for His plan of salvation being fulfilled!

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Gospels

August 5: John 1-2 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for August 5, 2017

John 1-2

John and his brother James were called the “sons of thunder” by Christ. Along with Peter and James, he was included in an inner circle of Jesus’. Five times the phrase “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is used. This is understood to be John referring to himself. It is believed to be the last of the four Gospel accounts written and John is believed to have been the last of the Apostles to die.

The first three Gospels are known as the Synoptic Gospels because they tell the story of Jesus similarly. They spend a lot of time discussing Jesus as the Son of Man and His humanity. This account is more topical and less chronological. John speaks from the viewpoint of Jesus as the Son of God and His deity. Throughout the book, John emphasizes Jesus as God. This is seen in John’s account of Jesus’ seven “I Am” statements that would have connected a knowledgeable Jew to the interaction between Moses and God. John also spends more time discussing the events in the upper room, the conversation surrounding it and the Resurrection. This is understandable as the resurrection is the final and most undeniable proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

John starts right off claiming the deity of Christ. Jesus was with God during creation. In fact, nothing was made without Him. John also states that in Jesus was life. (vs 3) I believe this to be a reference to Genesis 2:7 when God “breathed into his (man’s) nostrils the breath of life.” That life brought light to man. A major lesson that God gives us through creation is that light always overcomes darkness.

John now talks about the role of John the baptist as the preparer for Christ. He gave a witness to the Light, but was not the true Light. The true Light, Jesus, was to give man the opportunity to believe. This is a spiritual Light that was to shine throughout the world and throughout the ages. However, the world, as a whole, did not accept Him as God. Those that did accept Him were allowed to become the children of God. This was not because of a special lineage (will of the flesh) or because of the scheming’s of man (will of man). It is the will and plan of God.

Jesus became flesh (was born) and lived as a man. Jesus was not a spirit or apparition. He was as real as you and those you love. He came to bring grace and truth but also to declare the Father to man.

When John the baptist was quizzed by the religious leadership of the Jews as to who he was, he correctly points out that he is not the Christ, Elijah or the prophet. He is simply the one that is preparing the way for the Christ. He even tells them that the Christ is here, but they do not know Him yet.

While John the baptist is baptizing people in the Jordan, Jesus approaches. John proclaims Him as the Lamb of God that will take away the sins of the world. He also proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God.

The next day Jesus returns. One of John the baptists disciples began following Jesus. This was Andrew and he eventually gets his brother Simon. Jesus tells Simon that his name will be Cephas, which means a stone. The day after that, Jesus finds Phillip who is from the same city as Peter and Andrew. Phillip then goes and finds Nathanael. Nathanael questions whether anything good can come from Nazareth. When Nathanael approaches Jesus, He informs him that He saw him under a fig tree before Phillip found him. This causes Nathanael to instantly believe, but Jesus lets him know that there will be many more and greater signs than that.

Three days later Jesus attends a wedding in Cana. The planners of the feast had embarrassingly run out of wine. Mary wants Jesus to do something about it. Jesus is not as interested. However, Mary tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. He does tell them to fill water pots with water. After they do, He tells them to take some to the head of the feast. He is so impressed with the quality of the wine that he believes they had been saving the best for last. (Maybe that is where this saying comes from, I don't know.) John makes sure that we know that this was the beginning of the signs that Jesus did to prove His deity.

When Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Passover, He finds people conducting carnal business on the Temple grounds. There is no doubt that this had become a common practice of the day and Jesus had seen this before, perhaps when He was 13. He makes a whip and drives them out while tipping over the tables. He tells the crowd that His Father's house (the Temple of God) is not to be a place of making money. The Jewish leaders want to know what authority Jesus has to do this. He gives an answer with a hidden meaning. He tells them that when this temple is destroyed, He will raise it up in three days. They mock Him because it took 46 years to build the Temple. John makes sure we know that Jesus was not talking about the place of worship, but His physical body. Again, John is emphasizing the deity of Christ through the proof of the resurrection and that those that heard Him remembered this.

It is interesting that Jesus did other signs at this time, but did not do them as publicly as He soon would. John comments that Jesus was not ready to have other men testifying about Him. God's timing is always right, but does not always make sense to man. Jesus, as God, knew that the growth and timing of the Jews anger and hatred of Him was key to the timing of His death. I believe this is what Jesus was considering. If He did too much too soon, their anger would peak at the wrong time. There are other times that we can see Jesus controlling the timing of certain things, but I find this manipulation of the Jewish leadership intriguing.

Comment:

Joshua Riggins:

Doug, I am a bit behind, but hope you will bear patiently with a question to this 3 week old post.

What thoughts do you have on Christ's statement to his mother in John 2:4? Specifically the phrase, "my hour has not yet come." Based on John's use of this phrase throughout the book (cf. 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 13:1, etc.) it would seem that he was alluding to the time of his crucifixion. If this is the case, what is the point Jesus is making to his mother?

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Joshua, consider the symmetry between Jesus' statement to his mother here:

John 2:4 (NASB)

4 And Jesus *said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."

And then again here:

John 19:26 (NASB)

26 When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He *said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

Very dramatic bookends, Jesus speaking to his mother at the beginning and conclusion of his ministry, the identical form of address, "woman," the double entendre of "behold your son" as his hour has now come, the care for this woman at both ends, the contrast of the wedding feast and the cross, but the cross actually being the avenue to his own great wedding feast...

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:

I would agree that He is referring to the crucifixion. John, more than the other Gospel writers, points to Jesus avoiding or freeing Himself from situations that would lead to His capture. Once His time had come, He willingly submitted to the mob. He also tried many times to prepare His followers for His death. I believe these statements we're to that end. Thank you Charles Fry for the insight. I had not seen the symmetry.

August 12: John 3-4 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 8-12-17

John 1-2

During the night, a Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to see Jesus. He probably came at night because we are told he was a "ruler of the Jews." His interaction with Jesus would not have been well received by the council. Unlike his colleagues, Nicodemus expresses that he knows Jesus is from God. In fact, he uses the pronoun "we" indicating that this was a conclusion that other Jewish rulers had come to, as well. Jesus points out to him that a person must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus is confused thinking that Jesus is indicating a second physical birth. Jesus explains that He is speaking of being born of the water and the Spirit, not physical birth. This combination is shown in other places to be baptism. He then says that, just like the beginning and end of the wind, the beginning and end of a spiritual birth cannot be determined by man.

When Nicodemus again shows a lack of understanding, Jesus indicates that he should be able to understand as a teacher of Israel. If Jesus talks about earthly things and they do not believe Him, how will they believe them when He talks about heavenly things that are beyond their senses? Jesus is the only human that has seen the heavenly places. He is the only one that can explain them to us. This statement would seem to discount anyone else being able to do that. No one, no matter how sincere, has been taken to heaven and then "sent back" with a message. Later in life, John will be allowed to see into heaven in a vision, but only Jesus has experienced the full reality of heaven with complete understanding.

Jesus then explains the purpose of His death by referencing Moses and the children of Israel when they encounter the poisonous snakes. (Num 21) John 3:16 may be the most well-known verse from the Bible, but it very well be the most misunderstood, too. It is not accidental that Jesus speaks these words after describing a rebirth with water and Spirit. Yes, whoever believes on Jesus will be saved, but that belief is not simply an acknowledgement or feeling, it

is a rebirth that requires both water, something we can sense, and Spirit, something beyond our senses.

John refers back to an idea that he brought up in the beginning of this book, light. He quotes Jesus talking about how the light should be used to illuminate the darkness, but those that are evil actually prefer the darkness. That is one way we can know if we or another is truly following God. If they love and desire the truth, they are seeking the light. If they ignore the truth or rationalize a lie, they are not seeking the light.

Jesus and His followers now come to Judea where they were baptizing people. In chapter 4 verse 1, John makes a note that Jesus was not physically baptizing anyone, but His disciples were. John the baptizer was also baptizing people. John makes a conscious effort to point out the exact place and why he was there, because there was much water. This, too, has a purpose. God is making it clear that, even though we must be born of water, just a little water will not do for baptizing.

Some of John the baptizer's disciples and other Jews have a disagreement about purification. This, too, is important. The idea of Baptism was not new to the Jews. They had been doing it a long time as a purification ritual. They understood the process without explanation because they called by a descriptive term, immersion (overwhelming). The dispute, unlike today, was not about how to baptize, but about who was authorized to baptize. They are concerned because Jesus' followers were also baptizing people. John the baptizer reminds them that this is how he told them it would be. He had said repeatedly that he was not the Messiah; he was just preparing the way. He had also told them that when that happened, the Messiah would increase and he would decrease. This was as it was supposed to be. He encouraged them to investigate, believe and follow the Son of God to eternal life.

The belief among the Jews was that Jesus' disciples were baptizing more people than John the Baptist. This would have been a great concern for the Jewish leadership. As attention shifted to Christ, he left Judea and went back to Galilee. As they passed through Samaria, they came to a well that Jacob had dug and given to Joseph. The disciples go on into town to buy food and Jesus rested by the well. When a woman comes to get water, Jesus asks her for a drink. She is taken aback by this because she is Samarian woman and Jesus is a Jewish man; two culturally significant reasons that He should not have spoken to her.

Jesus tells her that if she knew who He was, she would definitely be interested in getting a drink of living water from Him. She chides Him for saying He could get her water because He does not have anything to drop down into the well. She also mocks him, slightly, by asking Him if He is greater than Jacob who dug the well. Jesus responds to her by telling her that with the well water she will be thirsty again later. With His water, she will never be thirsty again. This is one of the many moments that I wish I could hear the inflection in the woman's voice. I get the impression that she is now just having fun with Jesus. Maybe she thinks He is a little off, mentally. She wants some of that water so she is never thirsty and does not have to ever come back to the well. She is thinking only physically. Jesus is trying to turn a physical point into a spiritual lesson.

Jesus now asks her to go get her husband. This is not a simple answer for her. She has a past that is confusing. What she decides to say is that she does not have a husband. Jesus tells her that she is right because she has had 5 husbands and the one she is now with is not her husband. She realizes that Jesus should not have been able to figure that out from their limited and strange interaction. She decides that He might be a prophet of some kind. With that, she asks Him a serious question. Since the division of the kingdom under Jeroboam and Rehoboam, northern tribes had been worshipping away from Jerusalem. Now, with no tribal division, there is a division between those that consider themselves pure Jews and those that are of mixed heritage, in this case the Samaritans. As with all feuds, the longer they go on the less the current population really knows about the cause or underlying issues. All she wants to know is who is right? Where should someone wanting to be true to God worship? His answer is not what she expected. He tells her that eventually it will not be about a place, but about an attitude. The where will not matter, but the why and how will.

Now Jesus has her undivided attention. She is convinced in her mind that He may be the prophesied Messiah. This would indicate that she was knowledgeable about the subject and was looking for Him. When she asks about it, Jesus confirms her suspicion. At this point the disciples return and are very confused about why Jesus would be talking to her. She leaves her water pot behind, which started this whole thing, and runs back to the city. She immediately goes to the gate to tell the city leaders who she met and what happened. They come to meet Jesus for themselves.

Meanwhile, Jesus has more conversation with His disciples. They want Him to eat. He says He has food to eat that they do not know about. This confuses them even more because that is why they went to the city, to buy food. They are trying to figure out who gave Him food without the others knowing. Jesus must again help them transfer the physical point to a spiritual lesson. He speaks to them about the work they will be doing. It will be work that was started by others even though they will continue it. The result of the work is to the benefit of all and the glory of God.

Many of the Samaritans believed based on the word of the woman Jesus talked to at the well. After He stays there a few days, many more believe because of the things they hear Jesus say. Notice we are not told of any miracles performed here. Perhaps one of the most striking statements is in verse 42. The men of the city tell the woman that they now believe, not because of what she said but because of what they have heard themselves. This should be the goal of every teacher. Not to convict others just because they said it, but because they student can see it for themselves. As teachers of the word, we should never take that experience or ability away from someone. Instead, we should cultivate it as a hungering and thirsting for the word.

When Jesus leaves there and reaches His original destination of Galilee, He finds believers. He had left this place before because they would not accept Him. It was hard for them to see Him as anything other than the carpenter's son. But now many, who had seen the events at the Temple and heard the teachings, believed.

When Jesus comes back to Cana, where he turned the water to wine, a nobleman with a sick son begs Christ for help. Jesus seems to be frustrated that they are so interested in seeing signs. He finally tells the man to go home and that his son is healed. The man believes Jesus and heads for home. On the way, he meets some of his servants that tell him the exact time that the boy was healed. The man knows it happened when Jesus spoke the words. John also points out that this is the second sign that Jesus did in Galilee.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

(John 3-4) I think you're right, Doug, about the likelihood the woman of Samaria had some humor in her repartee with Jesus, and I think surely he likewise was "teasing" her with his banter. Serious thoughts, a beneficial message, but light and friendly and somewhat humorous in tone. Maybe in the exchange with Nicodemus too. Many times Jesus must have had a smile in his voice and on his face in these kinds of encounters. His overt friendliness must have been apparent. Even so, the woman was ready to change the subject in a hurry when the conversation got into her personal life, but there was no "escape."

August 19: John 5-6 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 8-19- 17

John 5-6

John recounts a miracle at the pool of Bethesda. This pool was thought to have healing qualities. In Jesus day, the Romans considered it an Asclepeion. These were healing temples dedicated to the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius. He was attributed to carrying a staff with a snake wrapped around it. This symbol is still used today in association with the medical arts. In Jewish tradition, an angel was responsible for “stirring the waters” to make healing available. Some of your translations will bring that out and some will not have the last part of verse 3 through verse 4. Versions translated before 1900 used Greek manuscripts that included the passage. However, there were discoveries of older manuscripts in the 1800’s that revealed that the verse was probably not in John’s original writing. In about 24 manuscripts, the scribes made notations for the next scribe that it was probably not original and four of the last five Greek words in verse 4 are not found in where else in any of John’s writings. So, versions translated after 1900 do not include it.

At this pool, Jesus encounters a man that had been afflicted with an infirmity for 28 years. Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed. The man is concerned that, because of his affliction, he is unable to be first into the pool. This shows that he placed some hope either the Greek mythology, Jewish tradition or both. Jesus chooses to heal him, which would have directly opposed both. The man picked up his cot and started walking through Jerusalem.

Some Jews see him and complain that he is carrying his bed on the Sabbath. The man tells them that the one who healed him told him to do that. They wanted to know who had done that. However, the man did not know who Jesus was. Later on, Jesus saw him in the Temple. This is an indication of the man’s faith in God. Jesus encourages him to not sin anymore and warns him of the consequences if he does. When he realizes that it was Jesus who healed him, he runs to tell the Jews. They are now angry with Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath. Jesus’ response is to tell them that He and His father have been working. The Jews become even angrier because He indicated He was equal to God the Father.

Jesus takes this opportunity to teach about His relationship with the father. He points out that the Son can only do what the Father does. This is because the Father loves the Son and will do even greater things. He brings up that the Father has the power to raise the dead and the Son can also give life. Also, the Father has given the authority to judge to the Son. If you want to honor the Father, you must honor the Son. Eventually even the dead will respond to the voice of the Son and He has the power to give life to those that believed but will execute judgement on those that do not. Jesus now uses the pronoun “I” instead of the noun “the Son of God” to make sure that they know He is talking about Himself and proclaims that His judgment is righteous because He is only interested in the will of the Father, not His own will.

Jesus admits that anyone could say anything about themselves, so now gives them a list of witnesses to the truth that He is the Son of God. He speaks of John the baptizer giving witness of Him. He points to the works that He has done. He brings up what the Father has said about Him. He also brings up what the Old Testament writers had to say about Him. Specifically, He challenges them about what Moses said about the coming Messiah. If they, they Jews that

held Moses and the Old Law on such a high pedestal, will not listen to Moses, then what would be the motivation to listen to Him?

As the time for the Passover came near, Jesus went to the Sea of Galilee where many people followed Him. As the people approach, Jesus asks a question to test His apostles. He wants to know what they will do to feed all these people. Phillip points out that they do not have nearly enough money to buy food. Andrew knows of a boy that has five loaves of bread and two fish, but readily admits that it is not enough. Jesus has them instruct the people to sit down and they discover that there are about 5,000 men (not including women and children). Jesus takes the boy's lunch, prays over it and has them pass it around. When everyone is full, they collect more leftovers than the food they started with. Their response is to praise Jesus as the Prophet of God.

Jesus recognizes that the authorities are on their way intending to arrest Him. He leaves and goes into the mountains alone. After a while, the apostles get in a boat to go to the other side of the sea. While crossing, a serious storm blows in. In the middle of the sea, tired, concerned and unable to see for the darkness, Jesus comes walking to them on the water. He has to calm them down, but when they realize it is Him, they allow Him to get in the boat and immediately they are at the shore where they were trying to go.

When the people realize where Jesus went, they follow and find Him. He tells them that they are only there because He fed them physical food. Instead, they should work for the spiritual food that He can provide. When they want to know what to do to be able to do the works of God, He tells them that the work of God is believing in the Son. They want to know what sign will happen and reference the manna that God provided in the wilderness. They seem to still be looking for Jesus to provide for them physically. Jesus tells them that the true bread from heaven is the One that came from heaven to give life to the world. They ask that this bread be given to them always. The word "always" indicates that they still did not understand that Jesus is trying to give them spiritual food for a spiritual life.

He finally comes right out and says that He is the bread of life. This is the first of the seven "I Am" statements that John records. These statements should remind anyone with knowledge of the story of Moses how God instructed Moses to refer to Him when facing Pharaoh or the people.

The Jews are now upset because they cannot reconcile two concepts: How could Jesus "come down from heaven" if they know his parents? Jesus emphasizes that if they knew and believed the Father they would know and believe Him. Jesus reiterates whoever ate the manna in the wilderness died but whoever eats the bread from heaven will not die. He then makes a controversial statement that the bread of life is His flesh that He will give for the life of the world. This was problematic because they were still thinking about physical bread and physical life. They don't understand how Jesus could give them His flesh to eat.

Jesus takes it one step farther by saying that if they did not eat His flesh and drink His blood, they would not have life in them. Keep in mind that cannibalism as well as the drinking of any blood was prohibited under the dietary commands of the Old Law. He is also teaching these things in a synagogue of the Jews.

When His followers are having trouble with these teachings, he tells them that there will be even more difficult things to understand. He tries, again, to help them see that He is trying to teach them spiritual lessons for spiritual life, not physical. He also points out that there are some among them that do not believe. There were many of His followers that that left that day and never returned. These teachings were just too much for them.

He turned to His apostles and asked them if they were going to leave, too. Peter has a great response: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Peter knew that Jesus could teach them how to gain eternal life and confesses that they were convinced that He was the promised Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus again points out that one of them is not completely convinced. John tells us that Jesus already knew that Judas would betray Him.

Comment:
Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Kevin Crittenden:
I'm not sure I know how to reconcile Acts 7:60 -

"And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

with John 5:22

"For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,"

Thoughts?

Replies:
John Morris:
I may misunderstand your question, so please help me if I'm missing something. I understand the "Lord" of Ac. 7:60 to be the "Lord Jesus" of Ac. 7:59, in which case Stephen is calling on Jesus (our judge, as you point out) to show mercy to the members of the Sanhedrin.

Butch O'Neal:
Yes...this seems so to me also. What reconciling seems necessary?

Doug Twaddell:
It is permissible and right to ask for mercy both for yourself and for others. I cannot expect God to be merciful to me but not to someone else.

August 26: John 7-9 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 8-26-17

John 7-8

Again, we see Jesus avoiding the Jews because it was not yet time for His sacrifice. His brothers try to convince Him to go to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. Their pretense is to allow disciples in the south to see His works. However, John tells us that His brothers did not believe. Later, His brothers come around, but not yet. Jesus tries to explain that they don't understand why or how much the world will hate Him and tells them to go ahead and go. They go without Him.

After they leave, Jesus does go, but incognito. The Jews were actively searching for Him, but could not find Him. John also points out the wide ranging opinions that were among the people. The people, though, did not discuss these things openly because they were afraid of the leadership. During the feast, Jesus goes to the temple and was teaching. Those that heard Him were amazed because of His lack of traditional education. He responds to this by

describing His relationship with the Father. What He teaches is from the Father. His authority is from the Father. He wants to give all glory to the Father.

He asks them why they want to kill Him. They try and pretend they are not. Jesus reminds them of an event from chapter 5 when He healed a man on the Sabbath and they became angry. He gives the hypothetical case of a boy that is to be circumcised on the 8th day, but that day fall on the Sabbath. If they would circumcise him, what is wrong with healing on the Sabbath?

The people now have doubts about the Jewish leadership. Their logic makes them wonder if it is known that He is the Christ because they don't stop Him from talking. They are confused because they think they know His origin but their understanding of the Christ is that His origin will be a mystery. Jesus tells them that they do know where He comes from. The Jewish leaders reinforce their goal of capturing Him because the people are beginning wonder if this isn't the Christ, what would another do that would be greater?

Jesus tells the people that He will only be with them for a short time and then they will not be able to find or follow Him. This leads them to believe that He might be getting ready to go to the Jews that had left Judea and moved to other parts of the world.

On the last day of the feast He repeats a teaching He gave to the Samaritan woman that He can provide living water. When He said this, it stirred more debate about Him. This time it was concerning the prophecy about the Christ coming from Bethlehem from the seed of David. The Sanhedrin sent men to take Him, but they did not. When they returned to the council, the officers question the men as to why they did not bring Jesus. They indicate they are captivated by His teaching. The officer's point out that none of them believes and they are concerned that the crowd does not know the law and call them accursed. Nicodemus, who visited Jesus at night in chapter 3, brings a point of order that they should hear Jesus out before they pass judgement. They challenge him to point out any prophet that came from Galilee.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives for the night and came back to the temple in the early morning. The Jewish religious leaders bring Him a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They ask Him if they should follow the Law of Moses and stone her. Jesus appears to ignore them, but then gives His famous instructions: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." Their conscience gets to them and they all go away one by one leaving the woman alone with Jesus. He tells her to go and not to continue sinning.

John records another "I Am" statement of Jesus. This time He says "I Am the light of the world." The Pharisees make the claim that because He is witnessing about Himself, His claims are not valid. Jesus tells them that what He says is true no matter who it is about. He also points out that the law says two witnesses make a thing true. He claims Himself and the Father as the two witnesses. When they question who His father is (probably wanting Him to either claim or reject Joseph as His father) He tells them that if they knew Him they would know the father. When He tells them that He is going where they cannot go, they wonder if He is going to kill Himself. In response, He tells them that He is not from this world like they are and if they cannot find their way to believe in Him they will die in their sins.

They point bland ask Him, "Who are you?" He tells them that the answer is the same as He has been saying all along. Again, He points to the Father, but they just don't (or won't) get it. He tells them that they will understand more when they crucify Him. He then tells the people that if they live in His word they are true disciples and that by doing that they will know the truth that will make them free. They question His statement by commenting that they are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone. I am not sure they were being honest about their own history because the Law of Moses was given after they were released from the

hand of the Egyptians and the Old Testament (Hebrew history) is full of times when they were in bondage many times. Instead of addressing this, which might have pointed their minds in a physical direction, He comments on the idea of being a slave to sin, which is not only a spiritual direction but also applies to everyone. He contrasts the position of a slave and a son. A son had the authority to free a slave. Because of their confidence in their physical lineage, they have no interest in the freedom from sin that the Son of God can offer them. When they again claim Abraham as their father, Jesus tells them they are not doing the works of Abraham so they must be following another. They are incensed at this idea and claim God as their Father. Jesus, once more, points out that if they were truly following God they would love Him instead of hate Him.

Because they will not listen with a true heart, they cannot understand His teachings. He tells them that their father is the devil (the other one that he alluded to earlier) who is a murderer and always lies. This is why they do not understand Him. Because they are so wrapped up in the lies of the devil, they cannot bear the truths of God. They now claim that Jesus is a Samaritan and has a demon, two vile accusations to a Jew. He tells them that because they are dishonoring Him they are dishonoring the Father. God, whose glory Jesus seeks, will judge them. If they will just keep His word they will never see death. Now they think they have Him. They know that Abraham and the prophets, God following and righteous men, are dead so they think Jesus is overstating His case. Jesus again points out that His only goal is to honor the Father, the one they claim as God. He says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." This makes no sense to them because there is now way, physically, that Jesus could have seen Abraham. Jesus tells them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." In the mind of the Jewish leaders, this is Jesus claiming equality with God both in name (I AM) and in eternal presence. This is more than they can bear. They begin to pick up stones to kill Him on the spot, but Jesus hides himself and walks right through them on His way out of the temple.

There is a lesson to be learned from the Jewish leaders. We must make sure that we are seeking the truth and the glory of the Father, not ourselves. We cannot put confidence in anything (lineage, tradition, appearances, etc.) other than the truth given to us by God. All those things lead us to be a slave of sin and the devil. The truth of God, with the authority of the Son, is the only thing that can set us free from that bondage.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

September 2: John 10-12 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 9-2-17

John 10-12

Jesus begins by making an analogy with a sheepfold. This was a place that shepherds could keep their sheep safe during the night. If someone got into the pen without going through the only gate, the easy assumption is that they are not supposed to be there. The shepherd would go in through the gate. The sheep would only follow the voice they are accustomed to.

When they do not understand the lesson, He speaks more plainly to them. He says, "I Am the door." This is to describe His role as in allowing His sheep in, but not those that would harm

the sheep. He also says, "I Am the good shepherd." This is to describe His leadership of the flock. A hired hand will not treat or protect the flock the same way as the shepherd will.

He alludes to "other sheep that are not of this flock." This is a reference to those that will follow Him that are not part of the physical Jewish lineage. He also proclaims His voluntary willingness to give up His life for the sheep. Again, these teachings divide the loyalties of the people. Some wonder if Jesus has a demon. Others question if a demon would heal someone.

When the Feast of Dedication comes, Jesus goes to Solomon's Porch at the Temple. The Jews want Him to announce if He is the Christ. He tells them that, through His works, He has already showed who He is. He reminds them of the sheep and Shepherd analogy and points out that since they will not listen to Him, they must not be His sheep.

When He concludes the discussion by saying that He and His Father are one, they pick up stones to kill Him. Jesus asks them which of His works are worthy of stoning? The crowd tells Him that they will stone Him because He has blasphemed. Jesus quotes from Psalm 82. Asaph writes that the children of Israel are the sons of God. Jesus makes a play on words here. All that follow the Father, acceptably to Him, are the children of God. As a Jew, it is true that He is "a son of God." However, He is also "THE Son of God." He encourages them, as He has before, to decide whether or not His works are from the Father. When they try to seize Him, He again escapes and goes to the Jordan where John the baptizer is teaching. Those that follow Him there point out that John did not perform any signs, but all the things that John said about Jesus were true.

Meanwhile, at Bethany, Lazarus becomes ill. His sisters, Mary and Martha send for Jesus to come. He tells those with Him that it is not a sickness unto death. Jesus stays two more days where He is and then announces His intention to go back to Judea. They try to dissuade Him by reminding Him that the Jews still want Him dead. Jesus talks to them about walking in the light and that Lazarus is sleeping. They don't understand, thinking that sleep will help him get better. Jesus tells them that he is dead and that they all must go to him to help everyone believe.

When they get to Bethany, Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days. Martha meets Him on the way and wonders why He did not come and heal her brother. He tells her that Lazarus will rise again. She confesses her understanding that the resurrection at the end of time is fact. He tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life." She now confesses her belief that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

Martha leaves to get Mary. When they both go to see Him, everyone else follows. Mary also wants to know why Jesus did not come quicker to heal her brother. Seeing the anguish that Mary and Martha are experiencing and being touched by the sorrow of all those with them, Jesus is moved to tears at the tomb. Jesus, more than anyone else, knew both what was to happen immediately and what would happen eventually with the two resurrections of Lazarus. However, even He felt sorrow at the death of a dear friend and the anguish of others. Others there also question whether Jesus could have healed Lazarus. Jesus tells them to move the stone that was sealing the tomb. Martha is concerned about the smell because he has been dead so long. Jesus reminds her of what He said to her earlier about the resurrection. Jesus prays to the Father out loud so that those that hear will learn more about their relationship and so that The Father will receive the glory and yells, "Lazarus, come forth!" Lazarus walks to the entrance to the tomb, still wrapped for burial, and is alive. I have often wondered if Jesus called him by name because of what would have happened if He had given a more general command.

You would think that this would have the same effect on all that witnessed it, but not so. Some believed while others went and told the Jewish leadership what happened. The Jewish council gets together to discuss what they are going to do. They are concerned that if Jesus is not dealt with, the Romans will take away their authority and dissolve the nation. Caiaphas, the high priest, gives an unintended prophesy about Jesus dying for the nation. His meaning is that Jesus should die so they can keep their place. The true meaning goes deeper than he could have ever imagined. With an increased zeal for His death, Jesus leaves the area of Jerusalem. The council sends word that anyone who knows where Jesus is should report it so they can capture Him.

About a week before Passover, Jesus goes back to Bethany. While they are eating supper with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary pours expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wipes it off with her hair. Judas complains that they should have sold it and given away the money. However, he does not really care about the poor; he has been embezzling money from their shared resources. Jesus tells them to let Martha do this because it is symbolic of His burial. Many people come to see both Him and Lazarus while the leaders are now planning on killing Lazarus, too.

When Jesus does finally go to Jerusalem for Passover, the people meet Him and cover the ground with branches. This was a sign of welcome for a king entering a city. This is all part of the prophecies being fulfilled. John, in 12:16, points out that none of them understood these things until Jesus was glorified and the Spirit gave them understanding.

Many people witnessed the raising of Lazarus. As they told others, it caused a large number to follow Him. The Pharisees realize that they have been unable to silence Jesus. No wonder they want to kill Him and Lazarus. It looks like the miracle had the desired effect.

During the feast, some Greek proselytes arrive to see Jesus. Jesus announces that His hour, which He repeatedly said is not here in the past, has now come. It is time for the seed, Him, to be planted in the ground to die so it can bring forth much fruit, us. The timing of the raising of Lazarus was important which means that the illness was also important. We see here God working among men and men not understanding the eventual purpose. That was the final push for the Jewish leadership's efforts to kill Jesus.

Jesus also admits that His soul is troubled. When he cries out, "Father, glorify Your name," a voice comes from heaven. Some thought it was thunder. Others thought an angel had spoken. Jesus tells them that God spoke for their sake. Jesus points out that He will be lifted up, His crucifixion, and will draw people to Him. This confuses them because they believe that the promised Christ will remain forever. Jesus tells them that He will only be with them a little while and then He leaves being hidden from them.

John points out that even though Jesus did many miracles, most people did not believe. This is a fulfillment of prophesy. However, John does say that many of the rulers believed but were afraid to speak openly. Their love for men superseded their love for God. Jesus again connects belief in Him with belief in the Father because His authority from the Father and His will is the same as the Father.

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:

I feel like I'm walking along with Jesus when you explain these scriptures and the perspective shines a new light on these familiar passages. I appreciate it. I pray you are feeling well.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

September 9: John 13-15 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 9-9-17

John 13-15

After they are finished eating, Jesus takes a towel and bowl and begins to wash the feet of the Apostles. Peter does not want Him to do that. This was a task for the lowest servant, not the Son of God. Jesus tries to help him realize that he will understand this later, but Peter continues to refuse. Jesus tells him that this must be done or Peter has no part with Jesus. Now Peter wants Jesus to wash his whole body. Jesus explains that they don't need a bath, just to be served. He singles out one of them, not by name, which is not clean. He means Judas.

When Jesus is done, He begins to talk to them about why He washed their feet. If Jesus, their Lord and Teacher, was willing to kneel before them in service, they should be willing to do that for others. Jesus does not want them to ever think they are too important or greater than anyone. That should be the lesson for us. We should always be ready and willing to serve others.

Again, Jesus indirectly points out Judas by quoting a prophecy from Psalm 41. He also reminds them that He is telling them ahead of time so that they will remember His words when the prophecy is fulfilled. When Jesus tells them plainly that one of the twelve will betray Him, they become concerned and want to know who it is? Jesus gives them a sign concerning dipping bread in seasoned oil, a fulfillment of the earlier prophecy. When Judas is given the bread, Jesus tells him to do it quickly. Amazingly, the others do not know what is going on. They think that Judas is supposed to go buy supplies for the poor. Judas leaves.

When Jesus and the others leave, He reminds them that He will only be with them for a short time and they should love each other. This is to be a defining marker in their lives. This should be the main reason that others recognize them as followers of Jesus. How do people recognize us as followers of Jesus? Do they see bumper stickers or jewelry? Do they see signs in or around our house? Do they know that we immerse, have communion every Sunday and don't sing with instruments during services? Our love for one another and those around us should be our honor so that God is glorified and Christ is lifted up.

When Peter insists that he is willing to lay down his life to follow Christ, Jesus gives the prediction about the rooster. John spends very little time on this event. Instead, he spends more time detailing what Jesus says to the apostles during this time.

Jesus tells them that, even though they cannot follow Him right now, He is going to prepare a place for them. When it is their time to follow, they will have a place with Him. Thomas wants to know how they will get there if they don't know where He is going. He tells them that He is the way, the truth and the life and is the only way to the Father. If they know Him, they know the Father and the way.

Phillip wants Jesus to show the Father to them. Jesus seems frustrated that they do not understand that He and the Father are one. Jesus' words are the Father's words. Jesus'

authority is from the Father. He tells them that if they love Him they will keep His commandments. If they do this, He will ask the Father to send another Helper, the Spirit, to help them. Jesus explains the connection farther. Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus. If we are obedient to Jesus, we are in Him and He is in us. Therefore, our connection to the father is through Jesus and our obedience to Him.

Judas, not the betrayer, wants to know how Jesus will show Himself to them. Jesus gives them a series of ways that they will know Jesus is with them. The first is that when they are obedient to Jesus, He and the Father will be with them. Second, He will send the Holy Spirit to help them remember His teachings. Third, Jesus will send them His peace so they will not be afraid. Instead of being sad about Jesus leaving, He wants them to rejoice that He is going to the Father so all these other blessings can be theirs.

John records a series of teachings Jesus gives on how believers should relate to others. Jesus starts by describing the believer's relationship with Him as a vineyard. He is the vine, the Father is the caretaker and we are the individual branches. The only way we can be fruitful is through our connection to the vine. If we are not fruitful, the caretaker will prune us away for the sake of the other branches. We stay connected to Jesus through our love for Him that is expressed in our obedience to Him.

Next, Jesus reminds them that the relationship between believers should be defined by love. We can fully understand love from His example. He was willing to give His life for us and we should be willing to give everything, even our lives, for each other. The teaching shown by Jesus washing their feet was to put this in concrete terms. If Jesus is willing to serve us because of His love for us, we should be willing to serve others because of our love for them.

The third relationship, and the most difficult, is between believers and non-believers. Jesus warns us that the world will hate us like it hated Him. If we act like the world, the world will love us because we are like them. The world hates Jesus because He exposed sin. This hatred without a just cause is another prophecy from Psalm 69.

Jesus reminds them again of the Holy Spirit that will give them remembrance of these truths. The Spirit will testify of Jesus to the apostles and they will witness of Jesus to the world.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! I love reading the gospels. Especially love the example of Christ washing the disciples feet. For He came not to be served but TO serve. A testimony to remember everyday of our lives that we might be like Him, serving others and not self.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug!

September 16: John 16-18 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 9-16-17

John 16-18

Jesus tries to prepare His followers for the persecution that will follow His resurrection. He talks about those that will kill them because they believe they are serving God. I can't help but wonder if He was thinking about Saul of Tarsus among many others. He comforts them with the thought that it is good for them if He goes away so that He can send the Holy Spirit to comfort them. The Spirit will guide them to the truth by speaking to them the words of Jesus which are the words of the Father. I would like to point out that Jesus uses the pronoun "He" when referring to the Holy Spirit.

The apostles question what He means. He tells them that their sorrow, at His death, would be replaced by joy, at His resurrection and the giving of the spirit. He uses the example of a woman in labor. Although it is painful and difficult at the time, that is replaced with joy at the sight of the child. Even though the pain is known about and remembered, it is no longer important. That is the way it will be with their sorrow and the joy to follow.

He also tells them that when they ask Him for things in His name, after His resurrection and ascension, He will provide. Specifically, he is telling them that He will no longer speak in parables or sayings, He will speak plainly to them and they will understand. When they admit that when He speaks plainly it reinforces their belief, He tells them that they will need a strong belief. They are about to be scattered and the world will cause them trouble, but He has overcome the world.

John now records a prayer offered by Jesus that appears cover three main subjects. The first part of the prayer is for Himself. He thanks the Father for allowing Him to bring eternal life to mankind and praises the Father for the glory He is about to receive.

The second part of the prayer is for the disciples that are currently living. He prays for the Father to watch over them when He leaves. Once He leaves, they will be more susceptible to Satan. So far, Jesus has been protecting them. The only one He gave over was Judas because that was necessary to fulfill scripture. Jesus asks the Father to sanctify them, set them apart, with His truth and defines that truth as His word.

The third part of the prayer is for all future believers. He describes these disciples as the ones that will believe based on the testimony of those He taught while He was here. Jesus is talking about us! His main concern is that they will have unity among themselves. He explains how that happens. Since Jesus is one with the Father, when we are one with Christ then we are one with the Father. All those that are one with the Father and the Son are by definition unified with each other. Since we can never be unified in our opinions, we must be unified by absolute truth and love. That truth is only found in God's Word and that kind of love is shown to us through the Father and the Son.

John now moves on to his account of Jesus' arrest. While they are in the garden, Judas approaches with a mob and troops to betray Him. John records that when they realize that Jesus is before them, they back up and fall to the ground. Jesus tells them that if they are seeking Him, they should let the rest of those with Him go. Peter now pulls out a sword and strikes the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Jesus tells Peter to put the sword away and, according to other accounts, heals the man.

They tie Jesus up and take Him to Annas. Annas was the previous high priest and is the father-in-law of the current high priest, Caiaphas. Extra-biblical sources tell us that the Romans were frustrated and angry with Annas. The council was afraid of potential repercussions so they replaced him. However, Caiaphas was mostly a figurehead as nothing was done without the approval of Annas. If nothing else, this is evidence of how corrupt they had become and how far they had strayed from the implementation of the Old Law.

It is during His time with Annas that Peter is watching and is approached the first of three times about his relationship with Jesus. Annas asks Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus points out that there are many people, including members of the council, that heard Him teach, received answers to their questions and know His disciples. He encourages them to ask some of them. Someone hits Him for speaking to the high priest in that manner. Jesus challenges them to point out what He said that was disrespectful.

Annas now sends Jesus to Caiaphas. Again we see that Peter is watching and is now approached the final two times about his relationship to Jesus. When Peter denies Jesus the third time, the rooster crows, which was the sign that Jesus had given him.

Jesus is now taken to the Praetorium to face Pilate. Interestingly enough, the Jewish leaders do not go in because they do not want to be unclean for Passover. This forces Pilate to go outside to speak to the Jews and back inside to speak with Jesus. This could not have made Pilate very happy with them and was probably a factor in his desire to get this entire mess over with and go back to bed. Since Pilate sees their issue with Jesus as a matter of Jewish law and not Roman, he wants them to go away and deal with Jesus themselves. The Jews complain that, since the Romans do not allow them to administer the death penalty, they want Pilate to make a ruling.

Pilate directly asks Jesus if He is the King of the Jews. First Jesus wants Pilate to admit whether the question is his or from the Jews. Pilate seems exasperated and wants to know why Jesus is before him. Jesus admits to Pilate that He is a king, but that His kingdom is not of this world. As proof, Jesus points out that there is no one fighting for Him. In the end, Pilate determines that Jesus is not a threat to the Roman Empire and has done nothing wrong.

Pilate offers to release Jesus for the traditional pardon of a criminal at Passover, but the Jews will not hear of it. They insist that Jesus be held and that Barabbas be released.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:
Thanks again Doug.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! You do a great job recapping each week. I love Christ proclaiming He has overcome the world! Gives me hope every day. I'm so grateful we have all 4 gospels. Golden nuggets from each. Do you believe it was John himself as the "other" disciple (known to the high priest), who brought Peter in and heard the testimony in the courtyard?

September 23: John 19-21 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 9-23-17

John 19-21

Having failed at attempting to release Jesus, Pilate has him whipped. The soldiers also put a crown of thorns on His head and a purple robe. They mocked Him as the King of the Jews and hit Him. Pilate presents Him to the people and tries again to release Him. The crowd begs for His death and advances the charge that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. This adds to Pilate's fears about Jesus, so he asks Him where He is from. Jesus simply does not respond. Pilate tries to coerce Jesus by flaunting his authority. Jesus tells Pilate that the authority is from God. Pilate becomes more anxious to release Him, but the Jews make Pilate choose between Jesus and Caesar. Pilate chooses Caesar.

Pilate again presents Jesus with the crowd continuing to call for His crucifixion and make the blasphemous claim that they have no king but Caesar. While charging Jesus with blasphemy, they deny God's authority.

Jesus carries the crossbeam of the cross to Golgotha where He is crucified with two others. Pilate has the charge against Jesus posted as "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The Jews take offense to this and want it changed to "He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate refuses to change the sign. The soldiers divide up His clothes which is the fulfillment of prophecy from Psalm 22.

We find out that Mary, Jesus's mother, is there as well as Mary's sister and Mary Magdalene. Jesus sees John with them and gives the care of His mother to John.

Jesus also asks for a drink so that another prophecy from Psalm 22 is fulfilled and then announces that it is finished as He dies. Since the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the crosses during the Sabbath, they ask for the soldiers to break their legs to speed up their death. When they get to Jesus, He is already dead. Instead of breaking His legs, they drive a spear into His side and blood and water come out. Again, both of these are prophecies being fulfilled.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both secret followers of Christ, claim the body and prepare it for burial. This would definitely mean that their discipleship is no longer a secret. They put Jesus in a new tomb that had no other bodies in it.

On the first day of the week, after Sabbath is over, Mary Magdalene visits the tomb and finds the large stone covering the entrance moved out of the way. She reports this to Peter and the others who go to see for themselves. They discover that there is no body, but the burial wrappings are there. John points out that they were apparently not aware of the scriptures that predicted Jesus rising from the dead.

As everyone else goes home, Mary stays. Two angels appear to her and she admits to them that she is concerned because she thinks someone has stolen that body of Jesus. Now Jesus appears to her, but she does not know it is Jesus. Thinking He is the gardener, she accuses Him of removing Jesus. When Jesus says her name, she immediately recognizes Him. He tells her to tell the others that He will be ascending to the Father.

That same week the disciples are together. Even though the doors are closed, Jesus appears with them. He shows them His hands and feet. Jesus breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. Thomas is not present for this event. When the others tell him about it, he will not believe it without proof. Eight days later, Jesus appears to them again when Thomas is there. Upon seeing the hand and feet of Jesus, Thomas calls Him, "My Lord and my God." Jesus pronounces a blessing on those that will not see the scars but still will believe.

John reminds us that Jesus did many things that were not recorded, but we have enough to believe.

John records that later some of the disciples are together when Peter announces that he is going fishing. All of them go out in a boat. As morning comes, they see a man standing on the shore who tells them to try fishing on the right side of the boat. They do and cannot bring all the fish into the boat. When they figure out it is Jesus, Peter jumps in the water and swims for shore. They rest follow in the boat. When they get to shore, Jesus has a fire going and is cooking breakfast for them.

After breakfast, Jesus has an interesting conversation with Peter. Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him three times. The first time, Jesus uses the Greek word *agapao* (to love dearly). Peter responds with the Greek word *phileo* (to be fond of). Jesus seems to be asking for a deeper love that Peter is not admitting to. This same exchange happens the second time. The third time, Jesus also uses the word *phileo*. One of the distinctions that can be drawn between the two concepts is that *agapao* is from the heart and is a matter of judgement and principle, while *phileo* is from the head and is a matter of sentiment or feeling. The principle custom of showing *phileo* was a kiss of greeting. Perhaps Jesus was pointing out that even Judas felt *phileo* for Him and He wants Peter to go beyond that to *agapao*.

Jesus then tells Peter that when he is older, he will be carried somewhere with his hands stretched out where he does not want to go. John tells us that this was a reference to Peter's death. Peter seems to understand this and asks about John. Jesus tells Peter to not worry about what will happen to John. The way Jesus phrased it, "If I will that he remain till I come," caused some to wonder if John would not die. John now identifies this disciple as himself and again says that there is no way to record all the things that Jesus did.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

There is a physiological explanation for the water and the blood accumulated in the chest cavity of course, and, the most important point is your point Doug, about prophecy, but also, for the Romans, this was about official confirmation that he was indeed dead! Amazingly, there were then, and still are today, those who try to deny this fact, that he really and truly indeed did die! Thank you for the study!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

YES, thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:

Thanks Doug!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

It has been pointed out to me and I'll share here that the word for "fire" in John 21:9 (a charcoal fire, a fire of coals) occurs only here and in John 18:18, which is the night Peter warmed himself by the fire and denied Jesus 3 times. John was surely calling our attention to the correlation between the denial in the courtyard and the renewal on the beach.

It is interesting (to me) that Jesus appeared to the disciples on the first day of the week (John 20:19) and then again after 8 days (we'd say a week later, the following first day of the week being the eighth day) he appeared to them again in similar circumstances. Ancient Christian

writers made much of the allegorical meaning of the "8th day", the first day of the week, as a new beginning, the Sabbath being past, the day of dedication/circumcision. Several writers in the 2nd and 3rd and 4th centuries stressed the importance in God's calendar of the 8th day, which is the first day.

When John tells us about the three questions and answers between Jesus and Peter (21:15-19), the words "agapao" and "phileo" may be synonyms used interchangeably, not a contrast or point of dissension. Elsewhere John uses the two words as synonyms, as for example in mentioning the "disciple Jesus loved" we have "agapao" in John 19:26 and "phileo" in John 20:2. Likewise in John 14:23 Jesus says the disciples love him, and the Father loves them, and the word is "agapao", while in John 16:27 Jesus says the Father loves the disciples and the disciples love Jesus, and the word is "phileo." There is a good deal of evidence that these two Greek words were used interchangeably. Peter's answers were not likely a prevarication, but intended as a direct and unassuming affirmation to Jesus' question each time.

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:

Thanks Charles. I had not considered the 8th day. I do think it is important. Also, I think there is significance in asking Peter three times.

I understand the possibility of the synonyms, but I think the use of both words in such specific contrast and in such close proximity has significance.

Ginger Hermon:

So heart wrenching! Thank you for highlighting these amazing chapters, Doug. Praise God for these 4 gospels. Thanks again for your earnest efforts in the 7 Bible study.

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Gospels

September 30: Acts 1-2 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 9-30-17

Acts 1-2

As we begin the book of Acts, let's look at a little background. Acts was written by Luke, the same author of the Gospel account. This is mostly based on the first verse. The author is writing this to Theophilis and references a "former account" by the author. In the first few verses of Luke, Theophilis is mentioned as the recipient and the book is referred to as an "orderly account" that covered the time of Jesus teaching until He was taken up. Luke was probably a gentile (in Col 4:10-14, Paul does not list him as one of those from the circumcision) which makes these two books the only ones written by non-Jews.

Luke gives a record of Jesus appearing to the Apostles during the forty days after His death. During these times, Jesus talked to them about the Kingdom and told them to stay together in Jerusalem until they were baptized (overwhelmed, immersed) with the Holy Spirit. When they want to know if this will be when the kingdom is restored to Israel (they are still thinking of the physical), He tells them that when they receive this power they will give witness of Him in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. This is the outline for the rest of the book of Acts as Luke documents the history of the spreading of the Gospel through the actions of the Apostles.

After Jesus is ascended, they go to Jerusalem to wait. Peter announces that they should replace Judas. He remembered two passages from Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. They set one main requirement; the new Apostle should be someone that was with them from the time Jesus was baptized until He ascended. This was so they could be an effective and truthful eyewitness Christ. We must not follow those today that claim to be apostles and are not. There is no way they can fulfill this main qualification. Two men are suggested, Joseph and Matthias. They asked God to choose between them and God chose Matthias. Joseph does not become discouraged at not being chosen. He is mentioned in Acts 15:22 as one of the men that is sent with Paul to disperse a letter from the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem. This is a tribute to his faith that he was a trusted brother and continued to be a pillar in the church.

On the Day of Pentecost (50 days after Passover which would make it a Sunday) the Apostles are together when the sound of a great wind fills the house and divided tongues of fire appear on them. At that moment they began to speak in different languages. The sound and commotion caught the attention of everyone in town. There were Jews from all over the world who were there for the feast. Some may have even been in town since the Passover. When they all gather, they hear the Apostles speaking. They are not speaking Hebrew or Greek, which almost all of them probably knew to some degree; they are hearing their own home languages. God, when man first was hearing the Gospel, made sure that everyone could understand it in a language that was comfortable. I think this is the reason that everyone should use a Bible that we can understand. The word should not be watered down or altered, but it should be in a comfortable language. There is no reason, in this day and age, that anyone in the world should have to learn an unfamiliar language and struggle to understand the Bible.

This also is another proof that the gift of speaking in tongues was not an angelic language or babblings, it was understandable, common languages.

While some try and figure out what is going on, others accuse them of being drunk. You can tell they are desperate because when someone is drunk, they usually struggle with their own language, not speak a complete foreign one. Peter is the one who takes the lead. This is important because the last time we saw Peter in a situation like this, he denied Jesus. This time he speaks with authority. He points out that they are not drunk. Instead, he quotes from Joel 2. This is a prophecy about what is happening right now before their very eyes. Power, by way of the Holy Spirit, is impacting the world through these men and eventually through others. Peter talks to them about Jesus and their role in His death. He reminds them that David prophesied about the coming Messiah and the events that have happened and uses those to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the one that David was talking about. He closes by telling them that Jesus, whom they had killed, is now both Lord (master) and Christ (the anointed of God).

Upon understanding and realizing the weight of what they have done, they search for an answer. They have just killed the Son of God. What possible hope could be available to them? What is God going to do to them? Is there any way that God will ever forgive them? Peter has the answer. Now that they believe, if they will just repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus their sins will be forgiven and God will live with them through the Holy Spirit. He also points to the future by saying that this is a promise to anyone who lives anywhere in any time. About 3,000 people are baptized that first day of the church. They did not just sit around. They learned and followed the Apostles' doctrine and they spent time together. They worshipped God and honored the sacrifice of Christ together. They responded to the miracles that the Apostles did in the name of Jesus. They shared with anyone that had need and sacrificed for each other. They did all of this simply and with joy. This caused even more people to be drawn to them and accept the Gospel as the church grew.

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:
Thanks Doug Twaddell

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! It's an incredible gift to have this book for our edification. Love the unity of the early church and acts of the apostles.

October 7: Acts 3-4 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 10-7-17

Acts 3-4

After the Day of Pentecost, Peter and John go to the Temple for prayer. They still are keeping current traditions of the Jewish faith. They see a lame man sitting there asking for money. Peter tells him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The man is immediately able to walk and leap. This is a man that was unable to walk since birth. This miracle is not just

in the healing of his legs, but also his nervous system, his balance ability and coordination between with a brain that has never directed those muscles before. Many of the Jews recognize him as the one that had, for so many years, sat and begged for money. The man will not leave Peter and John and this causes a crowd to gather.

Peter takes this opportunity to give another speech. He quickly points out that he and John had not healed the man, but it is the power of the name of Jesus. He reminds them that it is the same Jesus that they insisted should be killed and who God raised from the dead. He also admits that they did that in ignorance, but still calls on them to repent. Just because we don't know something is wrong does not excuse the action. We are still responsible for those sins and must deal with them before God when we are made aware. When we do, God is faithful to forgive them. He also points out that they have been allowed to be the first that are given the opportunity to respond to the sacrifice of Christ.

While Peter is speaking, the Jewish religious leaders take them into custody overnight. Despite that, there are many that respond to Peter's message bringing the number of believers to 5000 men plus women and young people.

The next day, the council gathers to question Peter and John. Their main concern is what power enabled them to heal the man. Peter again seizes the opportunity to teach. He first questions why they would be concerned about a good deed done to a helpless man. Then he tells them that it is the power of the name of Jesus, who they crucified but God raised from the dead. Peter in a couple of phrases condemns the council for not glorifying God for the mercy shown to the man and points out that, despite their apparent success in killing Jesus, God was able to counteract their purpose. He quotes from Psalm 118 about the chief cornerstone. This is the same quotation Jesus gave them after they questioned His authority to drive the moneychangers off the Temple grounds (Matt 21:42). Peter also makes the claim that salvation must come through Jesus because there is no other name powerful enough to save men.

The council recognize that Peter and John had been with Jesus when they realize that they are utilizing prophecies even though they are not educated and there is boldness and authority in their words. They also have the problem of a man that had never walked but is literally standing in front of them. They go into a closed meeting to discuss what to do.

They admit that there is no way to deny that a miracle has been done. Too many people saw it and recognize that they have seen the man at the Temple for years. The decision is made that they will threaten Peter and John to attempt to keep them from using the name of Jesus anymore. When they bring them back, Peter asks them if they should listen to the council or to God. Again, this would have reminded them of questions that Jesus posed to them. They refused to answer. To answer truthfully, you should listen to God first, would undermine their authority and admit that they had killed the promised Messiah. To claim the council is the higher authority would be blasphemy and the people would know their true hearts. After threatening them some more, they let them go. They are afraid to punish them any further because the people know that the miracle was real and are glorifying God for it.

Peter and John, upon their release, meet with the church and report what happened. They offer a prayer to God. Their prayer begins with praise and honor to God. They also admit to realizing that the death of Jesus was part of a greater plan. Remember, this is something they either couldn't understand or refused to accept while Jesus was with them. They then pray for boldness. They don't pray for God to punish the council or exact revenge for their threats. Again, this is something they were prone to ask for when Jesus was with them. Instead, they focus on how God can help them with their response to the threats. They ask for boldness to continue to speak the truth. They ask for God to heal more people and work other signs and wonders through the name of Jesus to prove to the world that they are speaking His truth. This

is how we should respond to threats and persecution. We should not retaliate or seek revenge because that is not our place. We should not ask God to do that on our behalf because that is not in line with the teachings of Christ. If we want God to seek revenge against those that disobey Him, we are seeking revenge against ourselves for we are all equally guilty. If we want mercy and forgiveness for ourselves, we cannot ask God to refuse that to others. God shows His approval of this prayer by giving them a physical sign (the place they were gathered shook) and filling them with the Spirit to grant their request for boldness in their speech. May we pray for such boldness and may God grant it to us.

Many of these early believers, remember, had originally arrived in Jerusalem quite a while ago. Some were no doubt from Jerusalem, but many were not. They have been there long enough that their resources that were originally to sustain them for a few weeks are running out. This is solved through the love of the brethren. They share with each other. Some realize that they have land or other possessions that they don't really need so they sell them and give the money to the apostles for distribution. This is when we are introduced to Joses. He was a Levite from Cyprus. I take the understanding that he possibly had no intention of returning to the island, so he arranged to sell his holdings there and gave the proceeds to the church. The apostles had nicknamed him Barnabas which means "Son of Encouragement (Consolation)." I sometimes wonder what our nicknames would be if the church called us according to our character.

Comment:

Paul Zinnel:

makes me wonder what my nickname would be and gives me the encouragement to improve and I have plenty of room for improvement.

Comment:

Paul Zinnel:

thanks doug

Comment:

Suzanne Ingle Harvey:

This is one (of many) of my favorite stories in the N.T. Thanks for the post & your comments.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

This story has always been a favorite, but especially so since the birth of our son Parker Wright with his Talipes equinus. There were no surgeons for that condition back then, but Jesus the Great Physician through his apostle Peter, did a surgery which not only perfectly reconstructed the man's feet, legs, and ankles, but taught his brain and body how to "Walk and leap!" The LORD and Peter were using this to "Make an opportunity" to preach the gospel!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug Twaddell! Especially during this busy and exciting time for your family.

Congratulations! ❤️ I sure love the book of Acts. This miracle and testimonials surrounding is

one of my favorites. It's a great lesson of praise placed to song. I often find myself breaking out in my happiest moments. This past summer we witnessed our 5 year old friend Elizabeth quote the chapter. A great inspiration!!!

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:
Thanks Doug!

October 14: Acts 5-6 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 10-14-2017

Acts 5-6

After Barnabas and others lead by example, Ananias and Sapphira sell some land. Ananias brings some of the money to the Apostles and keeps some. They want the notoriety of Barnabas without making the same sacrifice. Peter chastises Ananias by pointing out that the land was theirs and so was the money and they had full control over it. He says that they thought this through and conceived a plan to deceive. This was not a lie to men, but to God. Ananias immediately dies and is carried out. About three hours later, Sapphira arrives unaware of her husband's demise. Peter asks her if what they gave is what they sold the land for. She continues the lie of her husband. Peter connects lying to God with testing the Spirit of God and that she will die with her husband. She dies and is carried out. This caused the church to take notice and fear. It should cause us to take notice, too. We can be guilty of trying to appear more righteous than we are. Jesus called the Pharisees "white washed tombs" because of this same attitude. It reminds us that, even though our actions are important, God desires us to serve Him from the heart.

The Apostles continue to work miracles and regularly gather at the Temple. The church grows even more as great numbers are brought with the hope of being healed. This causes the High Priest to become concerned. Their earlier threats have not had the desired effect. They throw the Apostles in prison. That night, an angel opens the prison doors and tells them to go to the Temple and continue to teach. In the morning, the High Priest convenes the council and sends for the prisoners. The officers sent to get them can't find them. They report to the council that they found the prison doors shut, locked and guarded, but the Apostles are gone. Then someone arrives and tells them that they are at the Temple teaching. The captain of the guard convinces them to return to face the council without arresting them again.

The High Priest reminds them that they were told not to teach in the name of Jesus anymore. The council wants to know why they are still doing this and why they are trying to blame them for the death of Jesus. It has not been that long since these same Jewish leaders stood before Pilate and accepted the blame by saying, "His blood be on us and our children." (Mat 27:25)

The last time Peter and John stood before the council, they told them to judge whether they should listen to the council or to God. (Ac 4:19) Now he gives them the answer: "We ought to obey God rather than men." He tells them, again, that they murdered Jesus and God raised Him up to place Him in authority to offer forgiveness of sins.

This puts the council in a rage and plans are made to kill the Apostles. This prompts Gamaliel, the premier teacher of the council, to put the Apostles out and address the group. He reminds them of a couple of times that someone claimed to be the promised Messiah. When they died, their followers dispersed and the movement came to nothing. His advice is to leave the

Apostles and the church alone. His reasoning is simple, logical and in line with the history of the scriptures. If this movement is the invention of men, it will go away on its own. If this movement is from God, there is no way to stop it and they do not want to be found in opposition to God. The council agrees with Gamaliel. However, they warn them not to speak in the name of Jesus (like they have before), but they also beat them to emphasize their warning.

Instead of discouraging the Apostles, the experience invigorates them. They realize that if the same people that opposed Christ were opposing them then they must be correctly following Jesus. They continued to gather daily at the Temple and preach Jesus as the Christ.

By now there are a very large number of believers. Apparently, it is becoming more and more difficult for the Apostles to keep up with both their physical and spiritual needs. There was a group of widows that were unintentionally being passed over for help. The Apostles do not want their effort teaching the church to be hindered by the physical needs of the church. To solve this problem, they propose appointing some men to take care of the physical issues so they can focus on the spiritual. They want the body to pick them, but there are some specific qualifications that they insist the men have. They are to have a good reputation so the church trusts them. They are to be full of the Holy Spirit so there is spiritual consideration to the physical needs. They are to have wisdom so that their decisions are well thought out and sensible. Seven men are selected and they are appointed over the physical needs of the church. While they are not named such here, these men are filling the role of the later named deacons.

Stephen was one of those men and is now talked more specifically about. We find out that, even though he was tasked with caring for the physical needs of the church, he was still teaching and preaching. When a certain group of Jews is unable to successfully win arguments with him, they induce men to give false testimony claiming Stephen is guilty of blasphemy. The council arrests him and he is brought before them to defend himself.

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:

Thank you Doug. We just finished the book of Acts and are heading into Romans.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you brother Doug!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! Love the book of Acts! It's so hard to stop and not read until the end. 😊

Comment:

Debbie Bolinger:

Thank you!!

October 21: Acts 7-8 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 10-21-17

Acts 7-8

Stephen is standing before the council and has been accused of blasphemy against the Temple. This charge is brought because of the teaching of Jesus as the Messiah and the transition from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ. The council wants to know if the charges are true.

Stephen begins with God calling Abraham to leave his home and journey to a place that he has never been. Not only that, God did not give him a physical inheritance in that new place. God did tell him that he would have a son (even though he was old) who would produce descendants that would physically inherit the land. God even predicts that they will be in slavery for 400 years before God will bring them into the land. As a symbol of this covenant, God instituted circumcision.

The account continues with Joseph being sold into slavery because his brothers were jealous. While in Egypt, Joseph's great faith gave him favor in God's eyes who gave him favor before Pharaoh. When Canaan was struck with a famine, the brothers went to Egypt to find food where they encountered Joseph in power only below Pharaoh. Joseph showed them forgiveness and mercy and saved his family who became the nation of Israel.

Over time, the Israelites were enslaved by a Pharaoh that did not appreciate Joseph. During this slavery, Moses was born. After being hidden by his parents and found by a daughter of Pharaoh, Moses was raised and educated as an Egyptian, but knew of his Hebrew roots because of the influence of his mother. When Moses encountered the severe mistreatment of an Israelite by an Egyptian, he killed the oppressor. Because of this, he had to run away to Midian.

While in Midian, he became a shepherd, married and had two sons. It was during this time that God appeared to him in a bush that appeared to be burning but was not destroyed. God convinces Moses to take the lead in freeing the Israelites from slavery to a promised land given to them by God. It is pointed out to the council that Moses was rejected as a leader by his people, but he led them out anyway by the power of God. This is also used as a description of Jesus. Stephen then reminds them that literally days after they escape Egypt and while Moses is receiving the law from God on the mountain, the people make an idol to worship in place of the one true God.

Under Moses' direction, they built the tabernacle as a place to worship God and to represent His presence with the people. This was used through the days of David until Solomon built a more permanent Temple to replace it. Stephen refers to a passage from Isaiah 66:1 to point out that God cannot be contained in a physical house. This is something that Solomon admitted during the dedication of the Temple in Kings 8:27.

Stephen now compares the current council to their ancestors who resisted God's leadership and killed God's messengers. Just like them, they have rejected God and killed His messenger who was also the prophesied Messiah of Israel.

In 7:54, the council is "cut to the heart" (NKJV). This would appear similar to Acts 2:37. However, there are two different Greek words in play. Acts 7 is *diaprio* (to saw asunder or in two, to divide, to be sawn through mentally) while Acts 2 is *katanusso* (to prick, to pierce,

metaphorically to pain the mind sharply, especially the emotion of sorrow). These are two different reactions to the same message. In one case, the crowd on Pentecost, they were filled with sorrow at what they had done and driven to find a solution for their despondency. This is what Paul refers to as Godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Cor 7:9-10). The council did not feel sorrow, they only felt anger at the accusation. Instead of producing a drive for a solution, they were driven to hatred of the messenger. This is worldly sorrow (also from 2 Cor) which only leads to death.

Stephen is now given a glimpse into heaven and sees Jesus. This is all the council can take. They rush Stephen, take him outside the city and stone him to death. A young man named Saul is present and holds the outer garments of those participating. Stephen, with his last breaths, begs God for two things. First, he pleads for God to accept his spirit. Second, he asks God to not charge them with the sin of murder. This is a similar request that Jesus made concerning those that were crucifying Him.

Saul now begins an all-out persecution of the church. Because of this, many in the church leave Jerusalem and settle all over Judea and Samaria. This result of this persecution is the foundation of many churches and the initial spreading of the Gospel. God truly can make all things work together for good.

Philip, one of the appointed deacons in Acts 6, is preaching and performing miracles in Samaria. He encounters a man named Simon who had convinced the people that he had the power of God. This man becomes a baptized believer because of the things he sees and hears.

The apostles hear about what is going on and send Peter and John to bestow spiritual gifts to the believers. Simon notices that Philip could work miracles but the apostles could enable others to work the same miracles. He offers the Apostles money for this ability to pass on the gifts. Peter chastises him and tells him to repent and pray for forgiveness. Simon seems to get the message and asks them to pray for him, as well.

Philip is now told go to the area of Gaza. Once there, he sees a man in a chariot headed back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem. This is a distance of about 2600 miles (about the same as Los Angeles to Philadelphia). This would have been a long and expensive trip. Philip catches up with the chariot (with help from the spirit). The man is reading from Isaiah. Not everyone could afford their own personal copy of one of these scrolls. The man is confused as he reads (from what we call chapter 53:7-8). He cannot decide if the passage is about Isaiah or someone else. Philip begins right there (a messianic prophesy) and teaches the man about Jesus. Eventually they come to a body of water and the man wants to be baptized. On this long of a journey, he would have had plenty of water with him. If sprinkling or pouring was sufficient, there was no need to take notice of other water along the way or for the chariot to stop there. Philip has them stop and they both go down into the water to baptize the man. When the baptism is completed, Philip is miraculously taken away and the man continues on his way to Ethiopia. Philip ends up in Caesarea.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, brother Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Excellent summary, Doug! I love the testimony of Stephen. In Acts 6:5 he is introduced as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Truly, he was full of the Holy Spirit (7:55), wisdom

(6:3,10) and grace (7:60). Every time I read this account I fight back the tears. Thanks be to God for the spreading of the gospel after this event. As well, the forgiveness Paul received. Truly the Lord works everything together for good. <3

October 28: Acts 9-10 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 10-28-2017

Acts 9-10

Saul is stepping up his persecution of the church. He receives official permission from the Jewish Council to go to other cities and round up believers. At this point they refer to them as those who were of "The Way." His plan is to bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. On his way to Damascus, he is stopped by a bright light that blinds him. Jesus takes Saul's persecution personal. The church really is the body of Christ. When the church is persecuted, Jesus feels it.

Saul asks Jesus what to do. Jesus could tell him that he needs to repent and be baptized. Jesus has the information and Saul's attention, but chooses to have a man tell him. To me, this shows that Jesus wants the Gospel spread by his followers. It is our job to spread the message.

Jesus now speaks to Ananias. He tells Ananias where to find Saul and instructs him to give Saul his sight back. Ananias is not too sure about this. He seems to find it necessary to remind Jesus who Saul is and what he has been doing. Jesus, of course, knows what has been going on (remember he took it personally) and tells Ananias about His plan for Saul. He says Saul is a chosen vessel and will witness about Christ before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. He also predicts that Saul will suffer many things for proclaiming the name of Christ.

Ananias finds Saul and returns his sight. Saul is baptized and becomes the very person he has been persecuting. Saul ends up spending several days with the church in Damascus. On a side note, archeologists have found the street named "Straight" in Damascus. While they can't know the exact house, you could go walk down that street.

Saul wastes no time changing gears. Instead of persecuting the Christians, he begins to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. Possibly because of his background and education, he does this very capably and stymies the Jews. While this transformation amazes and encourages some, it does not sit well with the Jewish leaders. This was their champion and he is now switched sides. They decide the best way to deal with this is to kill him. It seems that this is their answer to everything. If they don't like what a person is teaching (Jesus, Stephen, Saul) or what they represent (Lazarus) they strive to eliminate their voice.

Their plans become known to Saul and the church. The decision is made to get him out of the city. Because the gates are being watched, they lower him over the wall in a basket. Barnabas goes with him and they travel to Jerusalem because Saul wants to meet with the disciples there. They don't want anything to do with him because they are afraid of him. Remember, the last time they saw him he was assisting in the stoning of Stephen and preparing to persecute as many others as possible. I have often wondered what the meeting was like when Saul encountered Stephens family and friends. Often when Saul recounts the evil he had done, I imagine him seeing their faces and feeling their pain.

Barnabas is successful in persuading the Apostles and Christians in Jerusalem that Saul has changed. I have always had the curious thought, "What would have happened to Saul without Barnabas?" While I am sure that God would have turned it for good and still used Saul, could

the brethren at Jerusalem have missed an opportunity to forgive and love? Thanks to Barnabas, Saul meets with them and boldly proclaims the name of Jesus in Jerusalem. Again, the Jews decide that their beloved and trusted Saul must die. The brethren send him to Caesarea and then on to Tarsus, his hometown. A great time of peace and safety follows as well as great confidence and reverence for God. No doubt Saul's conversion had much to do with these things as well as the influence of Barnabas.

We now see that Peter is traveling and arrives at Lydda. He heals a man that had been bedridden for eight years. This helps lead many people in the area to believe. While he is there, a sister at Joppa, Tabitha (Dorcas), dies. She had spent much of her time helping others. The church sends for Peter when they hear how close he is. When Peter gets to Joppa, the widows show him the clothes that Tabitha had made for them. What a wonderful tribute and memorial. I was privileged to officiate at a sisters' funeral. When I arrived, her family had placed many of the quilts she made over the back of the pews. It turned out this was a small sample of the total. Most she had given to new mothers, newlyweds or people in need. Many of these people were not connected to the church. Just a question, what if, at our memorial service, an accounting was made of all the good deeds we had done for others? How long would the list be? Peter makes everyone leave and brings her back to life. Again, this causes many to believe. Peter stayed with Simon, a tanner. (Simon stays with Simon)

Meanwhile, in Caesarea, there is a man named Cornelius. He is an officer in the Roman army, specifically a centurion in the Italian Regiment. God calls him a devout man who feared God, prayed always and was generous to the poor. He sees a vision of an angel who tells him to send for Peter and tells him exactly where Peter is staying. Cornelius immediately sends two trusted servants and a devout soldier.

As they are approaching the city, Peter has a vision. He becomes very hungry and sees a sheet being lowered down that has all kinds of animals that a Jew was not allowed to eat under the Law of Moses. Jesus tells him to kill them and eat them. Peter refuses because they are unclean. Jesus tells him not to reject something that God has accepted. This happens three times. Peter has a lot to consider. Why would Jesus order him to eat foods that are not allowed? What is the significance of the three times? While he is trying to understand these things, the Spirit tells him about three men that will arrive asking for him. He is to go with them without questioning where or why. At this same time, Cornelius' men arrive. Peter invites them to spend the night and they will travel the next day. Some other brethren go with them to Caesarea.

When they arrive, Cornelius is waiting and has gathered all his relatives and close friends. When Peter walks in, Cornelius falls down at his feet and worships him. Peter rejects this worship by pointing out that he is only a man like Cornelius. Peter now understands the vision he had. God was telling him that what used to be unacceptable (unclean foods) are now acceptable because God has deemed them acceptable. Cornelius tells Peter about the vision he had to contact Peter so they could hear the commandments of God. Peter comes to a complete knowledge of the vision. Whoever fears God and is righteous, no matter what nationality, is acceptable to God. Peter then preaches Jesus to them.

While Peter is speaking, the Holy Spirit comes on them and they begin to speak in tongues. The Jewish Christians that came with Peter are astonished. God has shown, without a doubt, that Gentiles can become Christians and are acceptable to God. Peter commands that they be baptized and they ask him to stay a few days. Peter has now, spoken to, taught, stayed with and eaten with (quite likely foods they were not allowed to have previously) Gentiles. Not that long ago, Peter would have considered them beneath him. Now he sees them as brethren.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, brother Doug! Good thoughts!

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:
Thanks again Doug!

Comment:

Jack Dyer:
Thanks Doug for sharing the testimony about the Sister 's funeral. To be adorned with the quiet actions of service and love rather than what is commonly claimed as "beauty" is the truly the finest adornment.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Two of my favorite chapters in the Bible! Praise God that He has granted repentance unto life for all. Thank you, Doug, for your faithfulness to this study and devoting your life in preaching this good news.

November 4: Acts 11-12 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 11-4-17

Acts 11-12

News of the events with Cornelius get back to the Christians in Jerusalem. When Peter returns, they severely question him. It is interesting that they are most concerned about where he stayed and what he ate. Their Jewish roots are showing around their Christianity. Peter takes his time and explains everything from the beginning. He starts with his vision of the sheet, includes the vision Cornelius received and how the Gentiles began to speak in tongues. He concludes with the question, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" This is the same basic question that they are constantly asking the Jewish council to answer. Remember that Peter had taken several other Jewish Christians so they could verify all of this testimony. The church ends up glorifying God that Gentiles have been granted repentance to life.

We find out more places that the Christians had scattered, but it looks like they are only preaching to the Jews. At Antioch, Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene were teaching Jews who were not born in Israel and spoke Greek. They were very successful converting them. When Jerusalem hears about this, they send Barnabas to Antioch. After some time edifying the brethren there, he leaves for Tarsus to find Saul. Barnabas brings Saul back to Antioch where they stay for a year. It is during this time that the believers in Antioch begin to be called Christians.

Also, prophets arrive from Jerusalem. One of them, Agabas, prophesied that a severe famine was going to hit Jerusalem. The Christians at Antioch decided to collect funds to help the brethren through this time and sent Saul and Barnabas to deliver it.

It is about this time that Herod gets ahold of James and kills James (the brother of John) making him the first Apostle to die. Naturally this makes the Jews very happy and spurs

Herod to seize Peter with the intention of killing him after Passover. While Peter is in prison, the church gathers to pray for his release. One night, Peter is sleeping (bound in chains between two soldiers with two guards at the door to the prison) and an angel appears to him. The angel tells Peter to get up. When he does, the chains fall off. The angel then tells him to put on his sandals and clothes and leads him past all the guards. Peter thinks he is seeing a vision, which helps us understand how real his visions seemed.

When he sees that it is all real, he goes to John Mark's mother's house where the church is praying. Rhoda responds to Peter's knock. When she recognizes his voice, she forgets to open the door and goes back to let everyone know. They don't believe her, even though it is an answered prayer. When Peter continues knocking, they go to the gate and find him. He tells them to let everyone know what happened while he leaves the area.

In the morning, the soldiers are extremely concerned that Peter is not there. The escape will surely be met severely. After Herod questions the guards, he has them put to death and goes to Caesarea. He focuses his anger on the towns of Tyre and Sidon. To ease this anger, the leaders of these towns gather to listen to Herod give a speech. They begin to shout, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" When Herod accepts this praise, God causes him to be eaten by worms and die.

All this time, the church grows as the word of God is spread. Saul and Barnabas go back to Antioch and they take John Mark with them. John Mark will become an important figure in the relationship between Saul and Barnabas. In Colossians 4:10, Paul tells us that John Mark and Barnabas are cousins.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Not at all the most important feature in the story, but it seems very likely to me the Hellenists in 11:20 are not Jews, but in contrast to the Jews mentioned in 11:19, are Greeks, telling us that Gentiles are being preached to as well, by these bold disciples who've come to Antioch.

Metzger has this: (A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament) In the present passage, where the preponderant weight of the external evidence combines with the strong transcriptional probability in support of Ἑλληνιστάς, the word is to be understood in the broad sense of "Greek-speaking persons," meaning thereby the mixed population of Antioch in contrast to the Ἰουδαῖοι of ver. 19.

Replies:

Doug Twaddell:

I can see that.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, brother Doug!

Comment:

Josephus gave a parallel account of this event, which is a little more revealing. From the Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary of the New Testament:

Josephus provides a much fuller and parallel account of the death of Agrippa I (see "Josephus's Account of the Death of Agrippa I"). According to Josephus, Herod appeared in

front of the people early on a sunny morning wearing an unusual robe made entirely of silver. As the bright morning sun shone on the robe and reflected brightly off of it, Herod gleamed in dazzling splendor. The effect on the people was precisely as Herod intended. They acclaimed him as a god. This is certainly not unusual for the time. Emperors were often honored as gods after their deaths. Gaius Caligula, however, was at this time insisting that people worship him as a god during his reign. Herod sought no less an honor.

November 11: Acts 13-14 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 11-11-2017

Acts 13-14

We find that in the Church at Antioch there were several men that were participating in the teaching even though an Apostle was there. It was during this time that the Spirit wants them to send Saul and Barnabas on a specific work. After fasting and praying, they send them out. While God could have chosen to send them without congregational authority, He chooses to. God is setting the precedence of the authority of an eldership and congregation directing, overseeing and supporting the work of those preaching the Gospel.

In Salamis on the island of Cyprus, they preached in the synagogues. We also find out that John Mark, Barnabas' cousin from Jerusalem, is with them. Still on Cyprus, they come to the city of Paphos where they find a man named Bar-Jesus who attempted to predict things by reading the stars. He is a Jew that is affiliated with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Sergius is described as an intelligent man who wants to hear what Saul and Barnabas have to say. Bar-Jesus attempts to keep Sergius from listening (probably because he would lose any influence over him). Saul confronts the man and he is struck with blindness. This caused Sergius to believe.

After they leave the island, they arrive on the mainland at Perga in Pamphylia. It is at this time that John Mark goes home to Jerusalem. While we don't know the exact reason he did not continue, it does become a bone of contention between Saul and Barnabas. We also are left to speculate why Luke begins referring to Saul as Paul. This name change sticks and may be connected to Saul's amount of work among the Gentile nations.

They travel inland to Antioch in Pisidia. This, of course, is a different Antioch than where they started. During the reading in the synagogue, they are invited to comment. Paul addresses them. He gives them a brief history lesson starting with God bringing the people out of Egypt, their wanderings and the distribution of Canaan. He reminds them of the time of the judges and the first kings of Israel, focusing on David. He then reminds them of Jesus' connection to the lineage of David and John's role in preparing the way. He encourages them to realize that the very Jews that had Jesus killed were unwittingly fulfilling prophecies about Him.

Paul brings up the resurrection and the many proofs of it. He points out that David, after he had served God and the people, died and decomposed according to nature. Jesus died but did not stay in the grave to decompose, which David prophesied about. He also informs them that it is through the name of Jesus that they can receive forgiveness of from sin. The Gentiles that were there wanted to hear more the next Sabbath. Many of the Jews and proselytes follow Paul and Barnabas.

On the next Sabbath, nearly the whole city turns out to listen. Instead of praising God for the interest of the people, the Jews become jealous and begin to contradict and oppose Paul. We

should never let pride get in the way when teaching the Gospel. Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase and it is to His glory, not ours.

This emboldens Paul and Barnabas who confront the Jews and tell them that since they have rejected the truth, they will go to the Gentiles. This thrills the Gentiles and many are converted all through the region. The Jews stir up trouble and have them kicked out of the area. They leave to go to Iconium, but the believers they leave behind prosper.

In Iconium, they are again successful in their preaching, but the problem Jews stir up more trouble. Eventually, the city is divided and an attempt is made to stone them. They leave and go to Lystra and Derbe in the area of Lycaonia.

In Lystra a man who had never been able to walk was there. Paul healed him so he could walk. The people there, avid worshippers of the Greek/Roman pantheon, believe Barnabas to be Zeus and Paul to be Hermes and prepare to offer sacrifices to them. Paul is finally able to persuade them not to do it.

When the Jews from Antioch and Iconium show up they convince the crowd to stone Paul. This is quite a turnaround. The people stoning him believe him to be dead and the believers gather around, but Paul stands up. He had to be bruised, bleeding, and broken. Most of us would move on down the road. Not Paul; he goes back into the city. I wonder what those potentially celebrating Paul's death were thinking when he walked back through the gates. I wonder what those that had believed him to be Hermes were thinking.

The next day they go to Derby. After preaching there, they retrace their steps through the places they had been. In those cities they teach, encourage and appoint elders. They bypass the island of Cyprus and go back to Antioch where they were sent out from. There they gather the congregation together and report on all the things that happened; including the accounts of the Gentiles who were converted. This is further confirmation of the interest in and authority of the Elders and congregation at Antioch over Paul and Barnabas's work.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you brother Doug! With the non-anachronistic writing style of Luke, we see him only using names for people and things, such as they were called at the time of the events in the history. So, we do not see him using the word "Deacon" in (Acts 6) nor the word "Evangelist" in chapter 13. This should give us insight on the "Saul/Paul" thing also. As Saul came to be more widely known by this Greek variant of his name, because of his work among the Gentiles, then Luke began to use that designation for him, to reflect the common use at the later time.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, brother Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug! You brought forth several excellent comments from our study. I have the hardest time stopping at the assigned reading on Saturdays. Praise God for the early church!

November 18: Acts 15-16 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 11-18-2017

Acts 15-16

While Paul and Barnabas are still at Antioch after their trip, some Christians from Jerusalem arrive and are teaching that a Gentile must be circumcised according to Jewish law before they can be saved. Paul and Barnabas dispute their teaching, but it is decided that they will go to the apparent source of the teaching. In Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas meet with the apostles, elders and the church.

After some discussion, Peter reminds them of his experience with Cornelius. He also points out that adding requirements is testing God and the Jews and Gentiles are both saved by the same process. Next, they hear Paul and Barnabas testify of their trip and work among the Gentiles. Next up is James. He quotes from Amos 9:11-12. He suggests that they send an official letter, so the Gentiles know the position of the Apostles. Everyone agrees that Paul and Barnabas will take the letter back with them. They also send two of their own number with them to offer testimony. They send Barsabas (who was one of the men put forward to replace Judas) and Silas (who will eventually travel with Paul). It is good for us to see that Barsabas did not have anger or resentment at not being chosen to be an Apostle. Instead, he became a trusted leader in the church at Jerusalem.

The letter they send is extremely important. First, they acknowledge the false teachers are from their number, but they make a distinction between those men who “went out from us” and Paul’s company that they decided to “send.” The distinction is between men that are operating under the authority of the leadership of the Jerusalem congregation and those that are operating with no overseeing authority. Second, they refute the teaching of circumcision before salvation. They do, however, tell them that they need to stay away from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from sexual immorality.

This letter brings joy to the congregation in Antioch. It would appear that it is apostolic confirmation of what they believed to be true when they refuted the false teaching. Barsabas and Silas stay for a time, but eventually are sent back to Jerusalem with greetings from the Antioch congregation. However, Silas decides to stay.

Paul and Barnabas decide to go back and visit the congregation they established on their trip. Barnabas is determined to take John Mark, his cousin, but Paul is not interested in taking someone that did not finish the trip last time. In the end, Paul chooses to take Silas with him and Barnabas takes Mark.

From this point, Luke focuses on Paul’s work with Silas. They begin by going north to visit Derbe and Lystra where Paul was stoned the last time he was there. While there, they meet Timothy who is the son of a Gentile father and a Jewish Christian mother. Timothy is known and has a good reputation among the brethren in the area. Paul decides to have him circumcised to lessen the issues with Jews who know his father is Greek. They are carrying with them the letter from Jerusalem.

Paul’s plan is to go north into Galatia, but the Spirit instructs him to go to Macedonia in northern Greece. When they get to Philippi, they find some women who meet on the Sabbath

for prayer. One of the women, Lydia, trades in purple dye and/or cloth. She and her household are baptized and they stay with the family.

They also encounter a slave girl that is possessed by a spirit that allows her owners to profit from her fortune-telling. When the girl starts following them around, Paul casts the spirit out. Naturally, this angers her owners because they can no longer profit from her. They proceed to drag Paul and Silas before the local judges who order them to be beaten and held in prison. At midnight, they are praying and singing to God while the other prisoners are listening. Suddenly, there is an earthquake that loosens their chains and opens the doors. The jailer is about to kill himself because he will be executed if the prisoners escape. Paul stops him and assures him that none of the prisoners are gone. Evidently, the jailer was also listening to their prayers and singing, because he wants to know what he needs to do to be saved. The man takes them home, washes their wounds and he and his family are baptized. He then feeds them.

The next day, the judges want them to be released and leave. Paul refuses to go, evoking his rights as a Roman citizen. They should not have beaten them without a proper trial. Now the judges are afraid, because they could be punished for this action. The judges go personally to Paul and Silas and ask them to leave quietly. Paul and Silas go to Lydia's house, encourage the brethren and then leave the city.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! I appreciated you pointing out Barsabbas. I hadn't thought about it during the reading. Glad to remember he stayed faithful; excellent example to us.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
I'm not sure they were the same Barsabbas? Acts 1 is Joseph Barsabbas and Acts 15 is Judas Barsabbas. Perhaps brothers both sons of Sabbas?

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:
You are right Marc. I did not pay close enough attention. It is probable that they are brothers (sons of Sabbas). Sorry for the confusion on my part.

November 25: Acts 17-18 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 11-25-2017

Acts 17-18

After leaving Philippi, they travel to Thessalonica. For three weeks, Paul goes to the Synagogue to teach them about Jesus and His connection to the Scriptures. Some of the Jews are persuaded and many of the Proselytes. The Jews who did not believe convinced some of the evil men from the marketplace to protest against Paul using the claim that he encouraged

following a king other than Caesar. They force Jason, who Paul and Silas are staying with, to pay money. After dark, the brethren send Paul and Silas away to Berea.

In Berea, they find the Jews more open minded and ready to search the scriptures to see if what Paul is teaching is true. As a result, many of both Jews and Greeks believe. However, when the Jews from Thessalonica hear about the success, they travel there and stir up a mob again. This time, Paul is sent away on a boat, but Silas and Timothy remain behind with instructions to follow as soon as they can.

Paul finds himself in Athens waiting for the others. He is stirred up over the immense amount of idolatry he finds in the city. He goes to the Synagogue, but also talks to whoever will listen in the marketplace. Greece was known for it's philosophers, and they take note of Paul. Some think he is crazy, but some wonder if he is talking about a foreign god. The idea of a resurrection intrigues them. They invite him to the Areopagus to discuss these things further.

When Paul sees they have a tribute to "the unknown god," he knows he has an opening. He informs them that he is going to tell them about the God they don't know about. While with the Jews, he would start with Abraham. With these Gentiles, he starts with creation and how man was made to seek out God. He also tells them that the Creator God cannot be represented with things man can make. He tells them that God wants them to repent and follow Him. He also brings up the idea of the resurrection form the dead. This divided the group with some making fun of him and others wanting to hear more.

Eventually, he leaves Athens and goes to Corinth. It is here that he meets Aquilla and Priscilla. They are Jews who had been kicked out of Rome. Since they are tentmakers, which happens to be a trade that Paul knows, he stays with them and works with them. Again, he tries to reason with the Jews at the Synagogue every week. When Silas and Timothy arrive, he becomes more bold in his teaching. The Jews reject him and the teaching. Paul is fed up with them and frustrated that the Jews won't listen. He symbolically shakes his clothes and tells them that he is going to focus on the Gentiles from now on. He goes to the house of a believer named Justus who just happens to live next to the Synagogue. Eventually, the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, is converted. Many other Corinthians follow. Jesus tells him in a vision that no one will bother them while they are in Corinth. They stay there for a year and a half.

When the Jews do finally try and cause him trouble, the proconsul, Gallio, won't hear the case because he thinks it is a waist of the courts time and Paul is set free. Instead, Sosthenes, the new ruler of the Synagogue, is beaten. Crispus is probably very glad he was receptive to the truth and this is quite a turn from what had happened in the previous cities.

When Paul finally leaves for Syria, we find that Priscilla and Aquila are with him. He cuts his hair as a sign that he wants to keep a certain vow. At Ephesus, the Jews ask him to stay longer, but he does not so he can make it to Jerusalem for the feast he has promised to keep. Eventually, Paul makes it back to Antioch.

We are introduced Apollos and some events surrounding him. He was born in Alexandria and is very competent in the scriptures. He is convicted of Jesus, but only knew about John's baptism. He is also traveling and preaching. He arrives at Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla hear him. They take him aside and help him understand the full truth including the baptism of Jesus. This is often used as a testimony to two things. First, it is not always necessary to call someone out publicly if a private conversation will do the job. Second, Apollos does not get defensive, he listens and accepts the correction which he then teaches with great success.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Thank you Doug! Say, speaking of Jews, did you know that your surname is Sephardic Jewish in origin, and part of clan Fraser in Scotland AND this would make us distant cousins on your dad's side? (we, already are on your mom's side) from a book I am reading.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Doug! We sincerely appreciate your faithfulness to the study. I'm grateful for the example of the Bereans who received the message with great eagerness. Such a wonderful attitude to have as we study passages daily as well.

December 2: Acts 19-20 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for December 2, 2017

Acts 19-20

While Apollos is in Corinth, Paul arrives in Ephesus. He finds some believers there and asks them about their conversion. Specifically, he wants to know if they have received the Holy Spirit. They have no idea what Paul is talking about. His next question is about their baptism. They talk about the baptism of John (Jesus' cousin). Paul, instead of chastising them, teaches them the truth and they are baptized in the name of Jesus. After that, God, through Paul, gives them the ability to speak in tongues and prophesy.

Paul also goes to the Synagogue and teaches there for about three months. When he feels he has reached all that he can, he moves his teaching to the school of Tyrannus. This continues for about two years. The location allows for people from all over Asia to hear the word.

While he is in Ephesus, God allowed unusual things to happen. It seems that even a handkerchief that Paul had used could be taken to someone that was sick and they would be healed of diseases and evil spirits. Some traveling Jewish exorcists and seven sons of Sceva, a chief priest, start attempting to cast out spirits by invoking the name of Jesus and Paul. Interestingly enough, the evil spirit refuses to leave saying that he knows Jesus and Paul, but not these men. The evil spirit then caused the possessed man to attack the exorcists. This causes both Jews and Greeks in Ephesus to believe in Jesus. Even those that used to practice various magical arts came together and burned their books to show their conversion.

It is at this time that Paul decides through the Spirit that he will go to Rome after Jerusalem. He sends Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, but he stays for a time in Asia.

Even though it has taken a while, opposition to the church does come. Demetrius made money selling silver icons of the Roman goddess Diana. A great temple dedicated to her was located in Ephesus. He convinces other artisans that their livelihood is being threatened by the teaching of Paul. He also convinces them that the temple of Diana will lose its prominence and be neglected. They stir up the city, descend on the local open theater and take Gaius and Aristarchus, two Macedonians traveling with Paul, captive. Paul wants to go in and speak to

the crowd in their defense, but the disciples and some friends that are area officials won't let him. Inside the theater, it is so chaotic that eventually groups are arguing about why they are even there. A Jew named Alexander, who is also a coppersmith, is called on to address the crowd. Paul names him in 2 Timothy 4:14 as a man who did much harm. The people don't allow him to speak when they find out he is a Jew. Instead, they shout "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" for about two hours.

Finally, a city official is able to quiet them down. He tells them that there is no need to cause such a commotion. If crimes have been committed or if there is a dispute between individuals, they should take it through the proper channels in the court system. Otherwise, he is afraid the Roman officials will take action against an unlawful assembly. With this, he is able to convince the crowd to disperse.

When this is all over, Paul tells the disciples goodbye and heads for Macedonia then on to Greece. After three months in Greece, he plans to go to Syria. However, he finds out about the Jews plans against him, so he goes back through Macedonia instead. He sails from Philippi to Troas where he stays for a week. On the first day of the week, Paul speaks to the church. Since the Jewish calendar started each day at sundown (not sunup), there is a good chance this would have been what we call Saturday night. About midnight, a man named Eutychus is sitting in a window (they were meeting in a third story room). He falls asleep and drops to the ground below and dies. God, through Paul, brings him back to life. The meeting continues until daybreak when Paul leaves.

He eventually lands at Miletus. While there, he asks the elders from Ephesus to come see him. He would have liked to go visit the church there, but is concerned that it will take too long. Remember, Paul was at Ephesus for several years. He would have had many close friends in the area. Also, there was that uprising right before he left. Chances are, he would have had trouble only being there for a short time with no issues.

His visit with the Elders covers a lot of topics. He reminds them of the time that he was in Ephesus; everything from the truth he taught to the struggles they had. He acknowledges that the Spirit has indicated to many that an arrest and difficulties are waiting in Jerusalem. He is not concerned about himself, he is concerned about those he has been working with. He instructs them to watch out for the Christians that have been placed under their supervision. He warns them that "wolves" are on the way that will damage the Church. He also warns that some of those problems will come even from among the Eldership. He points out that he did not teach and warn them for his own profit, but for their good. He also reminds them of something Jesus said that we have no record of anywhere else, "It is more blessed to give than receive."

When he is done speaking, they pray together and say their goodbyes with a lot of hugs and tears. They realize that they will not see Paul again in this life. This exemplifies the great love they had for each other and the relationships that were formed while Paul was in Ephesus. I, too, have had teachers and leaders in the Church that were role models to me that are no longer with us. I miss them greatly and their wise counsel. I also have visited with some of them knowing that it would be our last. I think, to some extent, I can understand the Elders encounter with Paul. I can empathize with their sorrow as can many of you. However, through Jesus our sorrow can be turned to joy in the knowledge of the resurrection and salvation. (John 16:20)

Comment:

Charles Fry:
Good stuff! Rigorous days for Paul and company!

The time references suggest Paul arrived in Troas on Monday and stayed through Sunday in order to meet with the church on the 1st day of the week. Sunday meeting was important, especially since Paul was in a hurry. Mention of "next day" departure and leaving after the all night session suggest this was Sunday-Monday, rather than Saturday-Sunday, since the morning departure was "next day", the Roman reckoning rather than Jewish in this Greek city.

I think that with chapter 19 and then chapter 20 we have the writing of 1 Cor, 1 Tim, 2Cor, Rom from Ephesus, Macedonia and Corinth. Productive times for our sake. I think Paul especially wanted to meet with the Ephesians elders because as indicated in 1 Tim 3 Paul very much wanted to be there to appoint them, but provided for Timothy to take care of it in his absence.

You are so right about the powerful bonds Paul had with these folks. Very poignant description of the tender care in both directions.

Replies:

Doug Twaddell:

Thanks for the info Charles Fry. I can understand the consideration of Sunday-Monday. There is a natural bias, which I may have just exhibited, with our "first day of the week" meeting traditionally in the morning.

Charles Fry:

Doug Twaddell i do have the same bias/inclination. I'm not "naturally" comfortable with a Sunday evening assembly for the breaking of bread together myself.

Joanne Caffie:

So it sounds like one is saying that Paul preached for approximately 6 hours and Charles is saying that he preached approximately 12 hours. Hhhhhmmmm either way I might have fallen out the window too.

Charles Fry:

😊 However long the session was, in Paul's behalf I will point out it was not a lecture. Although the KJV used the word "preached" in v7 and "preaching" in v9, the Greek word for speaking in 7 and in 9 is "dialegomai" from which we get the word "dialogue." The Greek word means to discuss, to reason together, or to argue. Most English versions don't make that meaning clear in this passage.

Acts 20:7 (NRSV)

7 On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.

Doug Twaddell:

That is a distinction I should have made. Having a "dialogue" or discussion was by far the most prevalent form of teaching. Giving a speech was not common in the synagogues and that practice carried over into the early church.

Joanne Caffie:

This all makes sense about women's silence as well. Thx 4 the clarification!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Doug. Chapter 20 always makes me swell.

December 9: Acts 21-22 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 12-9-17

Acts 21-22

After leaving Miletus, they made their way to Tyre and stayed with some disciples for about seven days. The disciples warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Again, they pray with Paul's party before they leave. Eventually, they arrive in Caesarea where they go to Philip's house. We also find out that Philip is identified as an evangelist.

Agabus, a prophet, comes to them from Judea. He symbolically takes Paul's belt and ties up his own hands and feet to demonstrate what the Spirit says will happen to Paul when he gets to Jerusalem. This causes the believers to beg him not to go there. Paul tells them that he is ready even to die for the name of the Lord. After a few days, they head for Jerusalem.

At Jerusalem, they meet with the elders of the church and tell them about their interactions with the Gentiles. They glorified God at the news, but warned Paul that there were rumors going around that he was teaching Jews to stop following the laws of Moses including circumcision. They want Paul to submit to Jewish customary purification to demonstrate that it is not true.

After the purification, Paul goes to the Temple. When some Jews from Asia see him, they start telling people that he was teaching against Judaism and they assume that he had brought one of the Gentiles into the Temple that had traveled with him. This ignites the fury of the Jews. They drag him out of the Temple and start beating him intending to kill him. When the commander of the Roman soldiers realizes what is happening, he intervenes and protects Paul by arresting him. Upon questioning the crowd, it cannot be determined why they were attacking him. When they try to take him into the barracks to get him away from the mob, it is difficult to get away from them. Paul asks to talk to the commander who apparently thinks he might be an Egyptian that caused some problems. Paul tells him that he is from Tarsus and would like to address the crowd. When he is given permission, he speaks to the crowd in Hebrew

When Paul begins speaking in Hebrew, the crowd listens. He begins by detailing his credentials as a Jew, including his heritage and education. He also cites his persecution of the church and offers the High Priest as a witness of these things. This probably sounds pretty good to the Jewish crowd, but then he tells them of his conversion on the way to Damascus. He tells about being blinded and Ananias giving him back his sight. He also details a conversation he had with Jesus while in a trance at the Temple where concern was raised that the Jews would not accept him and he was told to take the message of Christ to the Gentiles.

At the mention of any supposed message from God going to the Gentiles, the crowd is reignited. At this point, the commander takes Paul into the barracks and orders that he be whipped until they find out what he has done. Paul informs the soldiers that he is a Roman citizen, which means they cannot touch him without a proper trial. When they tell the commander, he goes to Paul and tells him that he had purchased his citizenship with a lot of money. Paul lets him know that he was born a Roman citizen, which would carry more weight with the Roman government. With this information, the commander also becomes afraid because he had tied him up and order him to be whipped.

The next day, the commander takes steps to put Paul in front of the Jewish council to determine what the accusation against him is and how to move forward.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Charles Fry:
A minor detail in the story, affirming again Luke's historicity in the details, in the reference to the Egyptian messianic pretender:
(Arch SB) Josephus told of an Egyptian false prophet who some years earlier had led 4, 000 people (Josephus, through a misreading of a Greek capital letter, reported the number as 30, 000) out to the Mount of Olives. Roman soldiers killed hundreds, but the leader escaped. "Terrorists" (the Greek here is a loanword from Latin sicarii, meaning "dagger-men") were violent assassins.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Paul's courage shines in chapter 22. Truly the Lord used Paul, "He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15 & 16) And he suffered much for His name. What a hero of faith! Thank you, Doug, for another excellent lesson.

December 16: Acts 23-24 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 12-16-207

Acts 23-24

Paul is now in front of the Sanhedrin. When he starts by stating that his conscience is clear, Ananias, the high priest, orders him to be smacked in the mouth. Paul challenges his authority to do that and says that God will strike him down. Others standing near by point out that he has threatened the high priest. Paul immediately admits he did not know who the high priest was and quotes from Exodus 22:28 about not speaking evil of Jewish leaders. Even though he does not agree with Ananias and does not recognize his religious authority over him anymore, Paul still respects the office of the leader of the Jewish nation. Perhaps this is an example that many of us should take to heart.

Paul is knowledgeable enough about the makeup of the group to realize that there is a natural rift between the Pharisees and Sadducees. He announces that he is being judged because of his belief in the resurrection. This is probably an argument that Paul was involved in many times because of his position as a Pharisee. This causes quite an uproar as the discussion becomes about the resurrection instead of about Paul. It is easy to see how politically charged this council had become. The Pharisees now actually side with Paul while the Sadducees remain against him.

The Roman commander is afraid for Paul's life, so he removes him from the council and takes him back to the barracks. That night, Christ comforts him. Paul is told not to be afraid because he will live to testify in Rome.

More than 40 Jews take an oath that they will not eat or drink until they have killed Paul. They ask the council to send for Paul, under the pretense of further questioning, so they have an

opportunity to kill him. Paul's nephew hears about the ruse and informs Paul who sends him to the commander. The commander instructs the nephew not to tell anyone else and makes plans to send Paul away from Jerusalem.

With a small army of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen, Paul is sent, in the middle of the night, to Caesarea to see Felix. He sends a letter to Felix detailing the events in Jerusalem with the Jewish council. He also points out that he has found nothing worthy of death and will instruct the council to send representatives to state their case before him.

I have often wondered about the men that took the oath. They obviously did not kill Paul. I wonder how long they went without food or drink before conceding they were not going to fulfill the oath.

When Felix reads the letter, he tells Paul that he will hear the case when Paul's accusers arrive. Until then, Paul is kept in Herod's palace.

Five days later, the council sends Tertullus, an orator, to present the case against Paul. His speech begins with an over the top praise of Felix. The accusations are that Paul was a ringleader of dissention among Jews and profaned the Temple. They claim they wanted to judge him according to Jewish law, but Lysias, the commander, violently took Paul from them and forced Felix to spend his time dealing with the issue.

When Paul is given a chance to respond, he denies the charges that he was inciting a crowd. He was just trying to worship God in Jerusalem. He does confess to being a part of "The Way" which the council saw as just another sect of Jews. He points out that, like the council, he believes in the Law and Prophets. He also admits that he has hope in a future resurrection of both the just and the unjust. He concedes that he feels he is being judged because of a claim he made about the resurrection before the council.

Felix has some knowledge about "The Way" and wants to hear from the commander, Lysias. He postpones judgement until that time. Felix tells the soldiers that while Paul is being held, they are to give him liberties and not keep his friends from visiting him. This would be an indication that he initially believes Paul has done nothing wrong.

A few days later, Felix called for Paul. Felix and Drusilla, his wife who is a Jew, want to hear more about his faith in Christ. While discussing righteousness, self-control and future judgement, Felix becomes afraid. He famously tells him to go away and they will talk again when it is more convenient. Felix continues to hold Paul and periodically call for him in the hopes that Paul will offer money in exchange for release. After two years of this, Felix leaves Paul in this situation when Porcius Festus takes over as governor.

Comment:

Cherris Lehman:
Thank you Doug!

Comment:

Charles Fry:
When Paul said the high priest would be struck by God, he spoke prophetic truth. Shortly after this he was removed from office by the Romans, and then when Jerusalem was in revolt his house was burned by Jewish zealots and he was hunted down as he hid in a water channel and assassinated, according to Josephus.

(Arch SB) "Ananias, the son of Nebedaeus, was the high priest from a.d. 47 to 59. He is not to be confused with the high priest Annas (a.d. 6–15). Ananias was noted for cruelty and violence. When the revolt against Rome broke out, he was assassinated by his own people."

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:
Thanks for the extra history.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks for your faithfulness to the study, Doug! Saturday has been one of my favorite study days this past year. I really appreciate your excellent summary each week.

December 23: Acts 25-26 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 12-23-2017

Acts 25-26

When Festus takes over as Governor, the Jews try again to kill Paul. They request that he be sent to Jerusalem with the goal of ambushing him on the way. Festus rules that Paul should be kept in Caesarea until he arrived. He invites the Jews to send accusers to meet him there and he will hear a trial against Paul.

At this trial, the Jews throw many accusations against Paul, but he is able to defend all of them. Festus asks Paul if he is willing to go to Jerusalem to be judged. Paul claims his right as a Roman citizen and requests to be tried before Caesar himself. Festus agrees to send him.

A few days later, King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice, come to see Festus. Festus runs Paul's case by Agrippa to seek his input and thoughts. Festus tells Agrippa that there were no charges worthy of Roman punishment. There are only complaints concerning the Jewish religion and about some man named Jesus who had died but Paul claimed was alive again. He also tells Agrippa about the request to go to Rome to be tried by Caesar. Although this is perfectly legal, it is strange because Festus can't find anything to charge him with. Agrippa decides he would like to hear Paul, too.

The next day, Agrippa and Bernice enter the judgement area with a great ceremony and all the important people from the city show up. Festus stands up and repeats the claims against Paul, that there was nothing he had found worthy of death and that Paul had requested to see Caesar. He also points out that this trial is in the hopes of determining relevant charges to send Paul to Caesar with.

Agrippa gives Paul permission to speak. Paul compliments Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish customs. He again recounts his credentials as a Pharisee and that he is being judged because of his stance on the resurrection. This time, he also includes an account of his journey to Damascus, the light, the voice of Jesus and his conversion. He tells Agrippa that all he did was obey the vision and the Jews don't like his message of repentance.

Upon hearing all of this, Agrippa proclaims that Paul must be insane. Paul responds by charging that he believes that Agrippa knows all of these things, because he is well versed in the events. Paul also challenges the possibility that Agrippa may actually believe all these things, too. Agrippa concedes that what Paul has said has almost persuaded him to become a Christian. Paul points out that he wishes that everyone gathered there would convert. Agrippa then privately consults with Festus and Bernice. He points out that, if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, they could set him free because he has done nothing worthy of imprisonment, let alone death.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Denise Waits:
I never understood why Paul appealed to Caesar if he would've been released without doing so.

Replies:

Marc Hermon:
It was the will of the Holy Spirit and the Lord Himself. Also the fulfillment of prophecy. Acts 19:21 , Acts 20:22-24, Acts 21:8-14

Acts 23:11 "And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

Charles Fry:
I don't dispute the hand of God being in these things, but from a human perspective, it no doubt appeared to Paul that the new and unaware governor was about to consent to send him to Jerusalem, to win the favor of the Jews, not comprehending the likelihood of murder in the process. To prevent that impending egregious error, Paul called upon his rights as a Roman. Paul knew his adversaries very well, as a former insider of that opposition to Christ. It certainly didn't look to Paul like this new governor was going to release him.

Acts 25:9 (NIV)
9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

Paul Rutherford:
Or simply Paul's undying desire to preach the Gospel to as many as would hear him speak as many did throughout this process. I am confident that Paul planted much Gospel seed along the way. 🤔

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thank you so much, Doug! Saturdays will forever connect my gratitude and thoughts to you leading this study. Although this day is where I've been best versed I have learned so much the past year. It's really helped to have your thoughts and brethren's comments for different

perspectives I had not considered. Very edifying. In today's study Agrippa's statement to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" can also be interpreted, "With so few words and such short time, are you trying to convert me?" It could be mockery toward Paul that he is trying to make a Christian out of Agrippa. Of course Paul replies back yes - Not only you but everyone here.

December 30: Acts 27-28 (Doug Twaddell)

Reading for 12-30-2017

Acts 27-28

To transport Paul to Rome, it is decided to travel by boat. He is entrusted to a centurion named Julius. Paul is also allowed to take some brethren along. During the trip, Julius is kind to Paul and allows him to visit friends and receive care. Because of weather, they sail near Cyprus to Myra in Lycia.

At this point, they change ships. The weather still causing problems, they sail near Crete to the city of Fair Havens. While here, there is a debate about whether they should continue. Paul suggests they stay for the winter, but the captain and the owner of the boat convince Julius that they can continue as far as Phoenix and winter there.

Soon after they are underway, a Euroclydon (nor'easter) hits. The crew is forced into many attempts to survive the storm. When they can no longer sail into the wind, they try going with it. They wrap the ship with cables to hold it together under the pressure. They throw some of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. The storm continues for many days and the crew begins to believe they will die.

When they had gone a few days without food, Paul reminds them that he tried to warn them. However, he tells them that God has told him that no one will die if they run the ship aground on a certain island. Nonetheless, when the sailors realize they are getting close to land, they are afraid to wreck so they drop anchors. When it does not look like the anchors will hold, the crew makes plans to abandon ship. Paul tells Julius that the crew must stay for God's promise to be fulfilled. The soldiers proceed to cut away the lifeboats.

Paul encourages the sailors to eat (they had not eaten for 14 days) and again promises that they will all live. Paul gives thanks for the food and they all eat. When everyone is full, they throw the remaining cargo overboard. They spot a beach that they are willing to run aground on and raise the anchors. Unfortunately, the ship stalls in a shallow place before they reach the land. This causes the ship to begin to break apart. The soldiers make a plan to kill the prisoners, so they do not escape, but Julius prevents them and gives the command that everyone is to get to the shore by any means possible. Just like God promised, everyone survived.

They find out the Island is called Malta. The people living there build a fire and are kind to them. As Paul is gathering some wood, a poisonous snake bites him. Paul just shakes it off into the fire. The people decide that Paul must have been a murderer, because even though he survived the shipwreck, justice will prevail. They continue to watch him for signs of the poison that will indicate his impending death, but nothing happens. Paul is just fine. They change their minds and decide that Paul must be a god.

An important man on the island, Publius, hosts them for 3 days. While they are there, the man's father becomes sick. Paul heals him. This leads to others coming to Paul to be healed.

After 3 months, they board a ship that honored the Roman gods Castor and Pollux. When they would make port stops, Paul was able to find brethren. Pretty soon, word spreads and brethren began meeting them at other ports.

When they finally arrive in Rome, Paul, while technically still a prisoner, is guarded by one soldier and allowed to live by himself. Within 3 days, Paul calls together the Jewish leaders in Rome. He appeals to them as Jews assuring them that he only appealed to Caesar because the Jews in Jerusalem did not give him any choice. He had been found guilty of nothing.

The Jewish leaders tell Paul that no one has come from Jerusalem or even sent word about Paul. However, they have heard of the church (they call it a sect) and want to know more about it. A time is set and a meeting takes place. Paul teaches them all day about Jesus using both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Just like everywhere else, some believe and some do not. When he quotes from Isaiah and informs them that the salvation of God will be taught to the Gentiles and they will believe, they leave.

Paul continues to live in a rented house for 2 years. While there, he taught many people that came to him about the kingdom of God and Jesus. The whole time, no one tried to prevent him from teaching in the name of the Lord.

Comment:

Beverly Schoonover Wattenbarger:

Thank you, Doug, for all your time and efforts for this study. I'm sure this has been a tough year for you. God bless you and your loved ones.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Thank you Doug for your Saturday efforts and closing out the 7 Bible Study for 2017. Many blessings to all of you who persevered all year and read through the entire Word of God. Also many blessings to all of you who spent more time in the Word of God than you did in 2016. "For 2 years, no one tried to prevent him from teaching in the name of the Lord." No one currently is preventing us from reading the Word for 2 years either! Let's take advantage of that blessing. Please join us again in starting on Monday as we read through the Bible in chronological order for another year in 2018.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Thank you Doug for your many posts elucidating the beginning of the gospel and the early days of the church. Your efforts have been a blessing and provided good encouragement to stay the course!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Doug!

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:

Thank you Doug for your work. Enjoyed it very much.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Reading the gospels and first 30 years of Christ's Church was truly the best! I literally have tears in my eyes, full of thankfulness for these words passed through the ages. So grateful to you, Doug, and all the brethren who helped me learn new details & perspectives I had not considered before. What a great few chapters to end on- clearly shows the spreading of the good news and success of the church was not mere work of man. Once again thank you so much, Doug! You persevered through difficult weeks throughout 2017. Despite, you continued to evangelize. We are grateful for your commitment to Christ and the Kingdom. You're a great blessing!