

Reading Schedule for October 1-7, 2018

A couple of years ago we made a conscious decision to slow down our reading and focus on shorter segments of the Bible. This will be particularly true this week as we read only two and a half chapters in Matthew. I encourage you to read the text through twice. The first time might be a read through, but the second time, slow down and listen to what God might be saying to you. This is when I like to write down the impressions that I think God gives me for my remembrance. Matthew is a fantastic book for us to absorb in a deep way.

October 1 – Matthew 13:24-43: “. . . and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.” (v.39) Since we’ve somewhat studied angels in Hebrews 1, I have been more thoughtful about their activity in my life. I am surprised how often the Bible mentions angels. And then it refers to the devil also, who has a host of angels on his side as well. In verse 41 we read that the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will separate out the good seeds, which represent the redeemed in Christ. Have you thought about angels this week? I think it is helpful to realize their presence in a spiritual way. The Lord has his angels very active on our behalf. In this world, the enemies of the Kingdom will always coexist with the sons of the Kingdom, as do the demons and angels interacting and battling as well. But when the harvest comes, we will realize the fullness of his Kingdom forever in heaven. Let us be encouraged with this truth. How does this reading inspire you?

October 2 – Matthew 13:44-58: “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?” (v.55) We don’t think about the family that Jesus grew up in very often. For 30 years, Jesus was participating in the occupation of his father Joseph as a carpenter. The record of Jesus’ life focuses on just three years, compared to the fact of his family and other children born to Joseph and Mary. The Catholic Church has tried to defend the perpetual virginity of Mary and referred to these children as cousins, or children that Joseph had from another marriage. That Mary was a normal human being actually elevates her to me. As a godly woman, the Lord chose her for this special purpose. Also, Jesus was truly human, even though he was the Son of God. These notes deepen the story and cause greater appreciation for Mary and her role, as well as Jesus being true man and true God. What caught your attention as you read these verses today?

October 3 – Matthew 14:1-12: “John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.” (v.12) This is a confusing story indeed. Jesus complements John the Baptist as being such an important person in the plan of God. But obviously his life was very short. His purpose must have been accomplished to the degree God intended, or John would have kept living. We have to embrace the sovereignty of God in a situation like this that is so upsetting. As I have read this story previously, I have thought about how John could have spoken to Herod differently. His confrontation could have been more relational. It seems that the king actually did have respect for John the Baptist, and might have been receptive to a different kind of confrontation. Nonetheless, God allowed John to be executed, and ushered him into eternity forever. How do you respond to this sobering story about the end of John the Baptist’s life?

October 4 – Matthew 14:13-21: “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered.” (v.17) I could have chosen any verse in the story because I am wanting you to contemplate the meaning of this event. This story is recorded in all four of the Gospels. Why is it that each writer included this miracle? In one account, I am drawn to the fact that Jesus had them be seated in groups. The food could be best distributed as groups of people would share together the loaves and the fish. This may be stretching it too far, but I’ve always thought that spiritual nourishment was deepest in groups. For seven years of my ministry life, I was in charge of small groups. Jesus formed a small group of disciples. A small aspect of the story in feeding the 5,000 was that they were fed in groups. Have you identified yourself with a group of believers who want to grow in their faith and live in community? I think that is the biblical norm. And to neglect such a connection is contrary to God’s will for you.

October 5 – Matthew 14:22-36: “‘Come,’ he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.” (v.29) This is the famous story of Peter walking on water. I have used it several times in a teaching moment to remind us that keeping our eyes on Jesus is essential. When Peter looked at the wind and the waves, he became afraid. When he was afraid he began to sink. Fear and doubt cause us to sink. They lead to a more hopeless perspective and press us into survival mode. But if we are confident in Jesus and sure of his control, we can live without fear and doubt. I want that for you. How do you respond to this fuller rendition of the story of Jesus walking on water?

October 6 – Matthew 15:1-20: “‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’” (v.8) Anytime I ever read this statement in the Scriptures, it always challenges me. What I do on the outside is of no value if it is not also true on the inside. The Pharisees were described as hypocrites because their actions were merely external and did not come from their hearts. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Jesus would call the Pharisees whitewashed tombs. That means that they were empty on the inside, but they looked like they were good on the outside. It is a subtle drift to manage your life in such a way that people will think well of you, but really, on the inside, it isn’t true. When we become overly concerned about what people think, and at the same time have little concern about what God thinks, we will do exactly what the Pharisees did. This is a challenging principle. How do you respond to it?

October 7 – Matthew 15:21-39: “‘Then Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was healed at that moment.” (v.28) The faith of this Gentile woman inspires me. The disciples were ready to discard her, but her perseverance was noticed by Jesus. Jesus’ primary focus as he walked the earth was to speak to the chosen people of Israel. However, we see that the Lord would respond favorably when he witnessed true faith. This Gentile woman’s attitude of faith allowed Jesus’ healing ministry to operate in a marvelous way for this woman. There are no external barriers to what God can do when genuine faith is alive and well. How is your faith in God’s ability?

PRAYER: **Pray that God will change our sense of hopelessness to hopefulness as we connect with Christ and each other.**