

Reading Schedule for October 22-28, 2018

I am quite sure the reading this week will not disappoint you as we step closer and closer to Jesus' teaching on his second coming. The Lord promises that he will return, and he gives us insights on what life will be like just before he descends from heaven. In the meantime, we will read several parables, and also hear Jesus' harsh words to the Pharisees.

October 22 – Matthew 22:1-22: “So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.” (v.9) It's such an interesting aspect of the Kingdom of God. Those who look like they should be invited actually have little interest in being part of the wedding feast. It gives a foreshadowing of the fact that most Jews would reject the Gospel and that the Lord would extend the invitation to the whole world. The idea of a wedding feast would be especially exciting to the listeners, as such a celebration would last for several days. Verse 14 suggests that many are invited, but few actually accept the call. This tells us that followers of Christ will always be in the minority around the world. But this does not suggest that we should weaken our effort to spread the good news. How do you respond to this parable?

October 23 – Matthew 22:23-46: “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (v.39) The people listening would know this commandment, but it would not be thought of with the same kind of regard as, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart. . . .’” Jesus puts the two together, even though the tradition of the Jewish people didn't necessarily match them together. But Jesus summarizes the kingdom life in these two commandments, and they are still as applicable today as ever. They connect the Old Testament to the New Testament, as we endeavor to love God and love others just like Jesus demonstrated. How do you understand love God with your heart, soul and mind? What do you think that means? How do you understand “love your neighbor as yourself?”

October 24 – Matthew 23:1-12: “They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.” (v.4) This short reading on the longer teaching of Jesus to the Pharisees was purposeful because I wanted you to contemplate the posture of the scribes and Pharisees. They were legalistic and yet could not even fulfill what they were requiring others to do. The Pharisees added many rules and man-made commandments to the list of requirements. This massive list of obligations had become burdensome and oppressive. It was used as a method of control. It was a form of spiritual abuse. Whenever you see that kind of posture from spiritual leaders, you should run because they represent self-centered religion and man-made demands. Jesus affirmed humility as the indicator of true greatness. The Pharisees had none of that. Why is legalism so destructive?

October 25 – Matthew 23:13-39: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.” (v.27) This represents the sixth “woe” of a list of seven that Jesus proclaims in these verses. It is the one that I remember more than any of the others. The word picture is especially descriptive – to clean the outside, and yet on the inside have dead man's bones. That is such a compelling rebuke. We can understand the message about looking good on the outside and actually empty on the inside.

There is a Scripture that says, “You honor me with your lips but your hearts are far from me.” That is the idea associated with whitewashed tombs. There are several woes here. Which other rebuke from Jesus got your attention?

October 26 – Matthew 24:1-35: “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” (v. 15 & 16) I know this is a very interesting chapter, as Jesus talks about the signs of the end of the age. I have thought about several of these signs when it comes to wars and natural disasters. It seems as if those have always been with us. The direction that Jesus gives is that they will increase as the time draws near. But when it comes to the antichrist in the holy place, this is a very clear “sign” of the last days. In 2 Thessalonians 2 we read about “the man of lawlessness.” This is also connected to the day of the Lord, which is described in verse 29 and in several Scriptures throughout both the Old and New Testament. There is much to say about these verses. But I will let you contemplate the meaning and the relevancy today. Do you think Jesus' return is soon?

October 27 – Matthew 24:36-51: “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (v.36) It is always important to realize that no one knows the exact day or hour of Christ's return, Too often, so called prophetic leaders, have told people that Christ is returning at a certain date, and the leader would suggest they sell everything and wait for Jesus on the mountain. But he never came when they predicted because we don't know. It is hard to understand the idea that the Son doesn't know the exact day, but the Father does, which is an interesting dynamic that can lessen our view of Christ. It most likely refers to the time when Jesus was on the earth. He had limited himself in many ways to offer himself to us as true man. Jesus Christ is the Messiah, but he is also the sacrificial lamb. He had all the properties of human nature, but also completely God, as we have been learning in Hebrews. But let me suggest that Jesus, who is now at the right hand of God, knows when he will return. Nonetheless, we live in anticipation of Christ's return, but we do not know the exact time, so we ready ourselves with diligence in serving God and being on mission for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Is that how you see it?!

October 28 – Matthew 25:1-13: “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.” (v.1) This is the first of three parable teaching about the time of Christ's return. Jesus is pictured as the bridegroom. It is customary that the groom and his friends would leave his house and proceed to the home of the bride, where the wedding ceremony was conducted, often at night. After this, the entire party returned to the groom's home for a banquet. This parable picks up from the theme of being ready and prepared for the Son of Man's return. Matthew 24:42 presents that important point. Christians should not merely keep looking for the coming of the Son of Man. Instead they should be at work and alert, serving God wholeheartedly. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 is also a passage on being ready. Are you ready?

PRAYER: **Pray for our Harvest Party as we are inviting many people in the surrounding community for this fun event taking place this Sunday beginning at 4pm.**