

Reading Schedule for October 8-14, 2018

If I told you that some of my favorite aspects of Matthew are in the reading this week, I would sound redundant, because that has been true almost every week. For example, Peter's confession is very significant to me, as Peter speaks the words of God to his small group. There is much to highlight; this will be a great week of reading God's Word.

October 8 – Matthew 16:1-12: "How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (v.11) I understand yeast to be negative in this case, compared to Matthew 13:33. But in both cases, the yeast multiplies. I am used to yeast referring to selfishness and sin that spills into the lives of other people when left unchecked. The Apostle Paul used these words, "bad company corrupts good morals." Yeast is used as something that influences others in a negative way. If the Pharisees are allowed to speak into the lives of the disciples, they will be affected negatively. It reminds me of the important principle of guarding your heart. Jesus was concerned that the disciples were vulnerable and that the religious leaders could easily bring them down. Be aware of the "yeast" that will surely affect the whole loaf if left unchecked. Jesus says be on your guard. How do you apply it to your life?

October 9 – Matthew 16:13-28: "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'" (v.16) This event is monumental, and so illuminating to the truth of Jesus' identity. What could be more important than that?! In fact, Jesus said he would build his church on this stable foundation connected to his message as well as the profound teachings about the Kingdom of God. Church is mentioned in this text, which is so helpful because the church would become the vehicle that Jesus uses to spread the message of the Kingdom. We learn that Christ is the cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20) Jesus is envisioning a community that would represent him on earth, and their profession would sustain it. Even the devil's attempt to bring it down will fail. How do you respond to this inspiring event with Jesus and his small group of disciples?

October 10 – Matthew 17:1-13: "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." (v.2) This is also a very special event because, again, it reveals Christ's identity. Jesus' transformation before them reveals that he is not just a man, but the Son of God. Jesus was walking the roads of life with his disciples, eating meals with them, and having the same kind of challenges that any other human being might have. But on this mountain, he is revealed as the transcendent One. And to add to the significance of this event is the appearance of Moses and Elijah, the ones who represent the law and the prophets. This event would remain significant to Peter all of his life, even as he would write about it in 2 Peter 1:16-18. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory in Hebrews 1:3. Jesus had to be a man, but he also had to be God. The inspiration of this event would sustain the disciples during the hardest of times, realizing that Jesus is truly who he said he was. What aspect of this event inspires you?

October 11 – Matthew 17:14-27: "He replied, 'Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'" (v.20) It doesn't say they had no faith. It says their faith was weak (little). You may

stumble over the statement that they could have faith to say to this mountain "move," and it would be moved. But that was a common phrase that describes something seemingly impossible. Believing God to do things beyond our ability is a very important aspect of faith. If we limit God's ability to the natural consequences of things, then we have little faith. The Lord will do what he is planning to do. But he will limit his activity in regard to our lack of faith. If faith was not essential to God's activity, then Jesus would not say what he said in this verse. May our faith grow to believe God, the One who can do the impossible.

October 12 – Matthew 18:1-14: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (v.10) This was a reference that I used when we were studying Hebrews 1:14. We looked at the evidence of angels in my sermon from September 23rd. When I asked the congregation if they believed in angels, everybody raised their hand. There is no doubt that Jesus is affirming the activity of angels in this verse. Even if it isn't specifically declaring that every one of us has a guardian angel, as has been the interpretation of some religious scholars, it does say that the angels are very active because they are in the presence of the Father, and then they are continuously and intentionally coming to our aid, even when we are unaware. I hope your thoughts about angels has increased and it gives you a sense of comfort, knowing that they are delighted to serve you. How do you respond to angels?

October 13 – Matthew 18:15-20: "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over." (v.15) These verses are very powerful and so practical. It is a subject which we all can relate to because we are all human and hurt each other on a regular basis. When you experience the offense of someone, when they sin against you in one way or another, the Scripture exhorts you to go to them one on one. This simple principle would alleviate so much misunderstanding and tension, because 95% of the time, a gentle confrontation results in forgiveness, and even reconciliation. But not all the time. And so we have instructions from Jesus on how to deal with someone who is sinning against the body of Christ. I have a whole sermon on this section, but I think you can see that the main point is having the courage to graciously confront someone who has hurt you in a sinful way with your desire to resolve the conflict. What else do you notice that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to obey?

October 14 – Matthew 18:21-35: "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants." (v.23) This parable follows yesterday's teaching. The Lord's goal in dealing with sin is to reach a place of forgiveness and reconciliation. But when we hold a grudge and remain unforgiving, we live contrary to God's heart of forgiveness. Forgiveness, ironically, is more about us than the person who has hurt us. If we hold a grudge and remain resentful, it does more damage to us and we live in a state of unforgiveness. It blocks the flow of God's grace in our life. We become stuck. This is an issue of bondage. This parable is very challenging and must be obeyed. How will you apply the teaching of this parable to your life?

PRAYER: Pray that God will give us all gracious courage to be honest with others who have hurt us, or we may have hurt.