

Reading Schedule for September 10-16, 2018

There is so much in what we call The Sermon on the Mount that we can't even get through the whole thing in one week. I do not want to race through these inspiring words, but suggest that this is time for contemplation. What was Jesus saying to the people of his day, and how does that translate into your life today? The religious leaders of his day were trying to earn their way into heaven, and Jesus clearly makes it beyond difficult to make it on good works. Even as I highlight a verse from our first reading, you will understand Jesus' emphasis more clearly.

September 10 – Matthew 5:13-20: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (v.20) This sounds like a verse that challenges us to do more good things. If we obey the law better than the Pharisees, we will then get to go to heaven. But Jesus calls his disciples to a different kind of quality of righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees took pride in outward conformity to many rules and regulations. But they still had impure hearts. Jesus was pointing to a kind of righteousness that begins on the inside and is lived out with new motivations and a change of heart. This is only possible through Jesus Christ. But as long as we try to earn our way, we will continually fall short. Do you have a different kind of righteousness? How so?

September 11 – Matthew 5:21-32: “And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” (v.30) It seems to me that most of us have our right hand intact. But according to this verse, we should cut it off. Because either your eye or your hand has caused you to sin at one time or another. Do you notice how Jesus overstates things to show them how much they deserve judgment? He wants them to feel guilty and squeeze out any sense of hope they have in being good enough. Romans 3:20 tells us that through the law we become conscious of sin. The religious leaders believed they were made right by fulfilling the law, but the New Testament teaches that we actually are condemned by the law. Does this make sense? How so?

September 12 – Matthew 5:33-48: “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” (v.39) I've always been impressed by the teaching in the New Testament concerning retaliation. One should not return an insult and thus escalate the violence by taking revenge. Leave room for God's wrath, as Romans 12:19 suggests. Acting in love towards an abuser who treats you poorly would be to follow in the steps of Jesus; to do as he did. It is very challenging to think about loving your enemy, and this is only possible as God empowers you to do so. How do you respond to these challenging words?

September 13 – Matthew 6:1-15: “But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (v.15) This has always been a challenging verse as it expands on the Lord's Prayer with the meaning of

forgiveness. Jesus emphasizes the importance of forgiving others, just like God forgives us. This reminds me of the theme yesterday, as we are to love our enemies. Someone who withholds forgiveness is going to be “owned” by the wrong done to them. True freedom is forgiving others like God has forgiven you. Otherwise, you remain stuck, and your relationship with God is impeded. This is a very inspiring section. What phrase caught your attention? Why?

September 14 – Matthew 6:16-24: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (v.21) The heart refers to the center of one's being. It involves the emotions, reason and will that define how we live. If the wrong things are at the center of our lives, then everything is thrown off. For example, if money takes precedence over our devotion and allegiance to God, we will give ourselves to what is temporary and find that the things of this world are no more than dust in the wind. This section about treasures in heaven is very compelling, as well as convicting. How do you respond to Jesus' message about what you treasure the most?

September 15 – Matthew 6:25-34: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?” (v.25) This is the topic of Jesus' profound teaching concerning worry and what you value. Jesus gives two examples in nature of how he takes care of the birds, or the lilies of the field. And they become examples for us to trust God. Worry demonstrates a lack of trust in God. It actually reflects little faith. The whole section culminates in verse 33 with these simple words, “Seek first the kingdom of God.” How does that apply to your life? What aspect of this profound teaching gets your attention? This is especially meaningful to me because I have found that worry can be an issue in my life. This passage leaves no room for worry. In fact, the Apostle Paul says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but rather pray.” (Philippians 4:6 & 7)

September 16 – Matthew 7:1-12: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (v.12) What do you think about this statement? Isn't this called the Golden Rule?! It is actually very helpful instruction because it challenges us to consider how we treat others because this should be consistent with how we want them to treat us. Behind this rule is really the great commandment, to love God with all your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Verse 12 is not really connected to the previous section, which is also very powerful as it highlights the words “ask, seek and knock.” This gets my attention because these words are in the present tense and they mean to keep asking, and keep seeking, and keep knocking, so that the Lord will answer. Persistent prayer is behind this message, along with the profound rule for life of whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.

PRAYER: Pray for deep community connections within our church family, along with the heart to serve God as we bless others.