

## Reading Schedule for September 17-23, 2018

We will not only conclude the Sermon on the Mount as we begin this week, but we will wrap up the week with our theme verse as a church. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." (9:37) May the ministry of Jesus inspire you and me to get involved in ministry. May this be an enriching week for your soul as you are nourished through God's Word.

**September 17 – Matthew 7:13-23:** "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (v.23) Obviously this is a very challenging statement from Jesus. People will declare their status before God in connection to what they did for God. But good works are not necessarily proof that a person is right with God. Good works can be for recognition, or paying someone back for the good things they had done for you. The key to Jesus' statement is knowing him. People may appear to belong to Jesus, but he is telling them that they were never truly saved because they never knew Jesus. Knowing Christ is the key to salvation. After that, the Lord inspires us to serve him well. How do you respond to these challenging words from Jesus in our short, meditative reading today?

**September 18 – Matthew 7:24-29:** "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." (v.24) What is Jesus saying to us in modern terms? He is challenging us to apply the Word of God to our lives. Just reading God's Word does not change a person's life. It may give you new thoughts, and there might be some benefit. But where the rubber meets the road is application. You are inspired and empowered to live the words that you read in the Bible. What Jesus is looking for in his followers are people who will do what he says, not just agree with what he says. Disciples who build their lives on the bedrock of Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God are truly wise, and will not be easily tempted by the shifting culture or the opposition of others. I've wanted us to take this short analogy about building your house on the rock so that you could ask yourself whether that is true of you. Are you digging a deep foundation, built on Christ? The Apostle Paul called that gold, silver and precious stones, compared to wood, hay and straw. Ask God to reveal to you the importance of building your life on the foundation of Christ.

**September 19 – Matthew 8:1-17:** "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.'" (v.17) The author Matthew quotes Isaiah 53 in this verse. Do you know the message of Isaiah 53? It is the strongest message about the suffering that the Messiah would go through on our behalf. It is a clear reference to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. We all believe that, but it is always inspiring to me to read how strong the message of Christ's identity is presented in the Bible. As a part of the reading today, you might want to look at Isaiah 53, especially verses 4 & 5. What aspect of Jesus' healing ministry inspires you the most? Why did Jesus show his identity through the healing power of God?

**September 20 – Matthew 8:18-34:** "The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'" (v.27) There is an important aspect to the readings this week that I want to highlight. Jesus is doing

many miracles that help people, and other miracles that demonstrate his authority over all of creation. This particular miracle shows that he is the creator God and he sustains all things. This last week we read in Hebrews 1:3 the fact that he sustains all things by the power of his word. Jesus spoke to the wind and calmed the sea by the power of his word. These acts of Jesus are building a foundation for his true identity and the main purpose that he came to save people from their sins. I would suggest that he shows who he is first, and then he tells the world who he is after that. You may do the same as you show your faith first, and then you tell other about your faith in Jesus.

**September 21 – Matthew 9:1-13:** "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples." (v.10) Have you ever heard of a Matthew party? Matthew invited his friends to meet Jesus. The word "sinners" is very strong and it refers to people who need forgiveness and a relationship with God. There is a renewed sense of vision and purpose for inviting people to your home practicing hospitality through a meal/party. Have you ever thought of doing such an event? I want you to know that I think it would go better than you might anticipate. Think about how to have a heart of hospitality. Jesus demonstrates the importance of this kind of ministry.

**September 22 – Matthew 9:14-26:** "Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." (v.17) This verse has been used several times to emphasize the importance of new methods in sharing the Gospel with today's culture. Just doing the same methods and expecting good results may be naïve and/or comfortable for us. New approaches to ministry are necessary for reaching the current culture for Jesus Christ. I am not really sure what those new methods are, but I am seeking God for the best ways to reach people with the Gospel. What is God asking you to do that is different than you have previously done to be more effective in sharing the love and message of Jesus Christ? The religious people of Jesus' day were unwilling to adjust, and were decidedly exclusive in the way they treated others. Jesus was the opposite.

**September 23 – Matthew 9:27-38:** "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (v.38) Recently, I have spent more time in prayer praying that people will be inspired to serve God. It is so easy to be consumed with my selfish desires and the things that make me happy. We obviously live in a very consumeristic world, where day after day we are bombarded with what we might need, as individuals, to make us feel good. Jesus had a very different emphasis. He wanted us to be inspired to serve others. He calls us workers in the harvest. Harvest represents people who need God, and we are the workers to reap the harvest. Would you join me in praying for hearts to be stirred up to serve God and focus on the needs of others?! May we be New Harvest in the truest sense of the meaning of our name!

**PRAYER:** Pray for the launch of the Book of Hebrews, that there would be a renewal in our church, as well as a renewal in our city, as wandering believers return to their first love.