

Reading Schedule for September 24-30, 2018

The first thing we read about in Matthew this week is the sending out of the disciples. I asked myself, "Were they ready?" But that's the thing about it. As I observed Jesus' interactions with people, he believed they could do more than they thought they could do. The focus is still on the mission and miracles of Jesus. But soon he will transition to more teaching. Even as we conclude the readings this week, we will read the most famous parable – that of the Parable of the Sower. Indeed, this should be another marvelous week in the Bible.

September 24 – Matthew 10:1-25: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'" (v.7) What I noticed about Jesus sending out the 12, is that they were called to do the same things he had been doing. He had not acquired gold or silver; he had traveled very light; he was empowered to do miracles; and he proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. The disciples did what they saw Jesus doing. Isn't that what it means to be a disciple? A disciple is a learner who has been taught by another who is further down the road. There is no question that Jesus was further down the road than his disciples, and they follow his example. We can too. What do you learn about being on mission in these verses?

September 25 – Matthew 10:26-42: "So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." (v.31) It seems to me that fear has a lot of power over our lives. I've always recognized the interesting reality that fear is mentioned in the Bible hundreds of times. When fear is mentioned, the majority of the time it means "do not" fear. You can be assured that God is always watching over you. Surely he will take care of his disciples as they are on a mission to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. Fear causes us to shrink back. The devil wants us to be afraid. Past experiences can cause us to be afraid. But Jesus empowers us to try again, and make a difference. What do you need from God to continue on the journey as a missionary for Jesus Christ?

September 26 – Matthew 11:1-19: "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (v.11) This is a very interesting statement. In this statement, I hear Jesus affirming John the Baptist, but I also hear him elevating the Kingdom of Heaven. I am sure you see those two aspects in this sentence as well. The calling on John's life was to prepare the way for the Messiah. This was an incredible privilege. No doubt, Jesus is referring to John's ministry, as well as his passion to fulfill his ministry. John was on the left side of the Kingdom of God, and we are on the right side of the Kingdom of God. He proclaimed it to be so, but he did not get the full revelation. So even while he is in prison, he asked Jesus if he should look for another. But we are on the right side of the Kingdom where we have seen all things accomplished through Jesus Christ, who died and rose again. That makes us greater than John the Baptist because of what we have the privilege to understand. Do you agree? What do you appreciate about being a part of the Kingdom of Heaven?

September 27 – Matthew 11:20-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (v.28) I've always appreciated the message that this portrays, with Jesus' invitation to be unburdened by him. His ministry to us was to lift our burdens, and to help us in our time of need. He is inviting us to

walk alongside of him, and he is much stronger than we are. A yoke is what depicts this kind of supportive relationship and partnership with Jesus. The Pharisees heaped huge burdens on the people, which they could not even carry themselves. But Jesus offers a relationship with him that is full of grace and assurance of victory as we hang onto him. What blesses you about this invitation in these last three verses of our reading? Why?

September 28 – Matthew 12:1-21: "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah . . ." (v.17) The author Matthew utilizes the prophecies of the Old Testament more than any other Gospel writer. He is writing specifically to Jews with concern for their understanding of Christ Jesus, and their need for salvation. The writer of Hebrews did the same thing in chapter 1 that we studied this past Sunday. These Old Testament prophecies are so special because they were written hundreds of years before Christ came to earth. This quotation is from Isaiah 42:1-4. The servant represents the Messiah, who is gentle, willing to suffer, and on a mission to bring justice to the nations. The good news arrives as Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of Heaven. I have always enjoyed the statement, "a bruised reed he will not break," which shows Jesus being gentle and compassionate for all those he loves. How do you respond to this prophecy written about Jesus? Does anything else get your attention, especially the message about the Sabbath?

September 29 – Matthew 12:22-55: "And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." (v.31) I think this is a topic that people ask me about more than any other. What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Whatever it is, it means that you are not forgiven if you do it. That is a big deal. I believe this sin is the sin of unbelief. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is to say that the Holy Spirit is not real. It is a response of rejection. To reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit is denying salvation. This sin is committed by unbelievers who deliberately and continually reject the invitation of Jesus, which is inspired by his Spirit. This is a warning to those who push Jesus away. What other teaching in this reading today caught your attention?

September 30 – Matthew 13:1-23: "As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up." (v.4) This begins the Parable of the Four Seeds, which is really pointing to four kinds of soil. The seed is scattered in all directions while the farmer walks up and down the field. It is easy for the disciples to picture this parable because it would happen so frequently, as farmers would scatter seed just like Jesus describes. But this is the most repeated parable in the Bible by Jesus, and it is profound because it says people respond in a variety of ways to the Word of the Lord. The Word of the Lord represents the truth of God's Kingdom and his offer of salvation. There are very many profound aspects of this parable as we see Satan's work; we see the distractions of life; and we read about the multiplication of fruitful ministry. The parable is sobering because it refers to different responses to Christ, but it is also encouraging because it shows the amazing ability of God to multiply his life in you and through you. How are you encouraged by this parable?

PRAYER: Pray for hopeful connections within our body that will help us all grow closer to Christ.