



WEEK OF FEBRUARY 25, 2024

(COVERS READINGS FROM FEBRUARY 25 – MARCH 2)

Overview

The following information is provided as a basic orientation to reading the Bible. Feel free to add to it and use it in any way that is helpful for your group. Also, feel free to make copies of these pages for members of your group!

Matthew 6:5-7:29 continues Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a kind of restatement of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20) and the law code given in Deuteronomy, emphasizing sincere and humble devotion. Jesus teaches about prayer, advocating for a private, heartfelt approach, contrasting with the hypocritical practices of the Pharisees. The Lord's Prayer (6:9-13) is a central element, providing a model for prayer. He discusses fasting, storing treasures in heaven rather than on earth (6:19-21), and trusting God for our needs instead of worrying (6:25-34). The sermon concludes with teachings on judgment (7:1-5), God's willingness to give good gifts to His children (7:7-11), the Golden Rule (7:12), and warnings against false prophets and the importance of building one's life on the teachings of Jesus, likened to a wise man building his house on the rock (7:24-27).

Centered in the heart of the gospel narrative, Matthew 13 features a series of parables: the Sower, the Weeds, the Mustard Seed, the Yeast, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, and the Net, each illustrating different aspects of the Kingdom of Heaven and our response to the Kingdom. In Matthew 15:1-32, Jesus confronts the Pharisees on their legalism, emphasizing inner purity over ritual cleanliness. It includes the faith of the Canaanite woman (15:21-28), showing God's grace extending beyond Israel, and the feeding of the 4,000, illustrating the universality of Jesus' compassion and divine provision.

Luke 9 stands as the critical pivot point in Luke's gospel, emphasizing the expansive reach of Jesus' mission and foreshadowing his "exodus" (v. 31). It recounts Jesus sending out the Twelve with power and authority, Herod's curiosity about Jesus, the feeding of the 5,000, Peter's confession of Christ, and the Transfiguration. These events underscore Jesus' divine authority, the nature of His kingdom, and the call to discipleship. Luke 10:25-37 includes the Parable of the Good Samaritan, a key teaching on loving one's neighbor and the expansive nature of mercy, cutting across cultural and religious barriers.

Matthew 14:22-36 follows the feeding of the 5,000 and narrates Jesus walking on water and the healing of the sick in Gennesaret. The miracle on the sea demonstrates Jesus' mastery over nature and serves as a revelation of His divine identity to the disciples, particularly through Peter's attempt to walk on water and his

subsequent rescue by Jesus (14:28-31). The healing miracles in Gennesaret (14:34-36) further establish Jesus' compassion and power to heal, reinforcing His messianic identity.

John 9 details the healing of a man born blind, which becomes a discourse on spiritual blindness and sight, important themes throughout John's gospel. The miracle provokes controversy among the Pharisees, illustrating their spiritual blindness (9:39-41). In John 11, the raising of Lazarus from the dead serves as a pivotal sign, demonstrating Jesus' authority over life and death and leading to a climactic belief in Him as the Son of God (11:25-27). This event sets the stage for the final sequence of events leading to Jesus' crucifixion.

In Mark 5:1-20 we find the healing of the Gerasene demoniac. Jesus' encounter with the man possessed by a legion of demons demonstrates His power over all evil forces. The transformation of the demoniac from a state of extreme torment to sanity and peace (5:15) underscores the liberating power of Jesus. The healed man's commission to tell others in Decapolis about what Jesus did for him (5:19-20) highlights the spread of Jesus' message beyond Jewish territories and thus, the universality of Jesus' mission.

Luke 22 details the Passion narrative, including the plot to kill Jesus, the Last Supper, Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial, and His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Last Supper establishes the practice of Communion, symbolizing Jesus' sacrifice (22:19-20). Jesus' agony in Gethsemane (22:39-46) reveals His human vulnerability and submission to the Father's will, foreshadowing His impending suffering and crucifixion. The narrative sets the tone for the culmination of Jesus' earthly ministry and the fulfillment of His redemptive mission.

General Discussion Questions

Use any or all of the following questions, depending how much time you have:

- How familiar were you with this week's readings? Was there anything that surprised you?
- What do you learn about God from these readings? What do you learn about humanity, or about human nature? How did the authors of these writings understand their relationship with God?
- What passages or aspects of these readings give you comfort or assurance? What passages or aspects of these readings do you find difficult to accept?
- Are there any particular passages that you want to study in-depth?

This Week's Discussion Questions

Matthew 15:21-28 | The Canaanite woman's encounter with Jesus highlights issues of cultural and religious boundaries. Whose voices are hard for us to hear today and how might this story challenge us to address our own biases and prejudices? How can it inspire us to advocate for inclusivity and justice in our communities?"

John 9:1-41 | The story of the man born blind challenges the disciples' and Pharisees' understanding of sin and suffering (John 9:1-3, 34-39). How does this story help us understand suffering in our lives, and how might it reshape our approach to those who suffer in our communities?

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, guide us in the imprint of Christ's footsteps to pursue justice, counting our neighbors' welfare to be as important as our own. Amen.

– from *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, © 2010.