

Sunday – October 15, 2017

Preparation

By way of Preparation, this week's reading will conclude the book of Matthew by taking us through the first account of the crucifixion. Again, this is the culmination of the First Coming of Christ. A perfect, sinless, 33-year life nailed to a cross to shed His blood for the remission of sin. Although we've previously mentioned Hebrews 2:9-10, these verses do such an incredible job of emphasizing the purpose "the Word was made flesh": "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Furthermore, verses 14-17 continue this thought pattern by providing the following, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." As we read through Matthew's account of the final hours of Christ, may we be constantly reminded that it was for the penalty of OUR sins that He had to endure the death of the cross to begin with. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Again, our finite minds really do not have the ability to comprehend all that went into His death, nor all that took place while He was dead, yet, we know that through His death, the power of sin and death was overcome by His resurrection. Therefore, because of such, we have the "power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

As the book of Matthew comes to a close, the Lord Jesus Christ, being resurrected, appears to His disciples and commissions them for the "work of the Lord" which still applies to this day. Matthew 28:18-20 teaches, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

To close out the week, we'll begin our journey through the book of Mark, which presents the Lord Jesus Christ as a "Servant". There is definitely a contrast between how Mark presents our Lord compared to Matthew's account, yet both do their part in providing a complete picture of our Saviour, therefore, providing the example that we as believers and followers of Christ are to follow.

Throughout this entire week of Daily in the word, may we be reminded of 1 Peter 2:21- 25, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

Monday – October 16, 2017

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 21-23

OVERVIEW:

The King's judgments (chapter 21:1-22:14); the King's defense (chapter 22:15-46); the King's denunciation (chapter 23).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into today's reading, chapter 21 begins with three signs to the Nation of Israel (21:1-22). These three signs are then followed by three parables (22:23-22:14). (Do note that between Matthew 13 and Matthew 25 there are 12 parables on the Kingdom of heaven, corresponding to the 12 tribes of Israel. They all deal with Israel's rejection of her Messiah, and from a doctrinal standpoint have no application to a Christian in the church age.)

The first sign is the COMING of the KING, what we typically refer to as the "Triumphal Entry" (21:1-11). This is the fulfillment of the prophecy we read just a couple of weeks ago in Zechariah 9:9 – *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."* In Matthew 21:9, the people quote Psalm 118:26 – *"Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD."* Note that this passage is an exact fulfillment of the Second Coming, keeping in mind that at this point, all of the Old Testament conditions and promises could have been fulfilled without the "parenthesis" of the church age. The "mystery of the church" was something not revealed until Ephesians 3, and all Old Testament prophecies, as Peter indicated in I Peter 1:10-11, saw no intervening period (i.e. church) between the *"sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow."* Through this sign, our Lord revealed Israel's spiritual blindness.

The second sign is the CLEANSING of the TEMPLE (21:12-16). The fact that the Temple had become a place of merchandise will give you an idea of Israel's inward spiritual condition. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 in 21:13, calling the Temple *"my house,"* a claim of His deity. When the chief priests and scribes accuse Him of receiving the accolades intended for the Messiah, Jesus quotes Psalm 8:2 – a Messianic Psalm! You gotta love it! In this sign, our Lord revealed Israel's inward spiritual corruption.

The third sign is the CURSING of the FIG TREE (21:17-22). The fig tree, of course, is clearly a picture of Israel (see Matt. 24:32-33; Luke 13:6-10). The fig

tree had leaves but no fruit. The parallel passage in Luke 13:6-10 reveals that the tree had three years to bear fruit, but didn't. By this time, Jesus had revealed Himself to Israel for a period of three years, but all they had was an outward show of religion (leaves), but no reality (no fruit). In this sign, our Lord revealed Israel's outward fruitlessness.

In 21:23-29, Jesus comes into the Temple to teach and while He's teaching the chief priests and elders come and question His authority. He answers by pointing them to a question of John the Baptist's authority. They understood that if they said his authority was from heaven, Jesus would ask them why they didn't get baptized. If they said that his authority was from men, the people would have beat the devil out of them (which is exactly what they needed!). They politely pleaded the "fifth," and Jesus politely followed their lead.

He then proceeds into three parables that have to do with the Nation of Israel.

Parable #1 – The two sons (21:28-32). The point is, Israel rejected God the Father!

Parable #2 – The vineyard and husbandman (21:33-46).

The point is, Israel rejected God the Son! (Do recognize, however, the reality of 21:37 – *"They WILL reverence my Son!"*! Philippians 2:10-11 says, *"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."*

Parable #3 – The marriage feast (22:1-14). The point is, Israel rejected God the Holy Spirit! (Acts 7:51).

The remainder of chapter 22 (22:15-46) can be broken down by four key questions that are asked:

- A political question about taxes (22:15-22).
- A doctrinal question about the resurrection (22:23-33).
- An ethical question about the law (22:34-40).
- A personal question about the Messiah (22:41-46).

As we then come into chapter 23, Jesus takes the first 12 verses to explain some things to His disciples and the multitude about the scribes and Pharisees (who are sitting right there in the Temple with all of the folks he is addressing), and then in verses 14-33, He speaks directly to the scribes and Pharisees. And, oh

buddy, when you read what He says to them, brace for impact! He delivers a series of 8 “woes.” These “woes” are seen best in comparison with the 8 “Beatitudes” Christ laid down in chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount.

Woe #1 (23:13) – The proud “shut up” the kingdom. The “poor in spirit” inherit the kingdom (5:3).

Woe #2 (23:14) – “Devourers” receive “damnation.” “Mourners” receive “comfort” (5:4).

Woe #3 (23:15) – The proud send people to “hell.” The meek inherit the “earth” (5:5).

Woe #4 (23:16-22) – Those who hunger and thirst for material gain are found empty. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled (5:6).

Woe #5 (23:23-24) – The proud reject mercy because of insignificant details and are judged (i.e. woe!). The merciful shall obtain mercy (5:7).

Woe #6 (23:25-28) – The outwardly pure but inwardly rotten will be judged. The inwardly pure (i.e. “pure in heart”) “shall see God” (5:8).

Woe # 7 and #8 (23:29-33) – Murderers and persecutors of the righteous are “children of them which killed the prophets” (i.e. the “devil”!). Peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness are called “children of God” (5:9-12). Chapter 23 closes with Jesus’ heartfelt lamentation over Jerusalem. And ain’t that last verse a dandy?!! *“For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me hence forth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD”* (23:39). In other words, as a nation, they won’t see Him again until the time of Jacob’s trouble (Dan. 21:1; Jer. 30:7), when in one day (Hosea 6:1-3; Isaiah 26:12-21) the nation of Israel will be converted and healed (Rom. 11:26-27; Heb. 8:8-12) as they recognize that He is, in fact, the Messiah (Acts 2:36), and will cry out for His return (Psalm 44, 68, 74, 79, 83).

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 24-26

OVERVIEW:

The King's return (chapter 24:1-25:46); the King's preparation (chapter 26:1-56); the King's trial (chapter 26:57-27:26).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The first verse in today's reading is tremendously significant: *"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple"* (24:1). Once Jesus (the glory of the Father – John 1:16), "departed" out of the Temple, He would not return again(!) and that Temple was doomed for destruction. You could say that He wrote "ICHABOD" over the door (1 Samuel 4:19-22 – "Ichabod" = "the glory is departed"). Jesus walks out and immediately begins to talk about the Temple's destruction (24:2).

Verse 3 of chapter 24 is also tremendously significant. After leaving the Temple, Jesus and His disciples make their way to the Mount of Olives, and there they ask Him a very important question. They say, *"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* What is so incredible, is that as they ask this question about the time of the second coming, Jesus is sitting in the exact place His foot will first touch when He comes!!!! (See Zech 14:4). Wow! Does God have a sense of humor, or what?!

Now, chapter 24 is one of those key places in Matthew where people allow themselves to get spiritually disoriented and doctrinally discombobulated. The context here has nothing whatsoever to do with the church! By the time the events Jesus is about to describe take place, the "parenthesis" of the church has already been raptured out (1 Thess. 4:13-17), and Daniel's 70th week has kicked in. The events He describes in chapter 24 and 25 have nothing to do with the church age, but will be fulfilled during the Tribulation Period, the time of Jacob's Trouble (Dan 12:1; Jer. 30:7). In fact, these very signs Jesus describes are listed in this exact order during the Opening of the first six of the Seven Seals in Rev. 6:1-16, which also is describing the Tribulation Period, or in the words of the disciples in verse 3, *"the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world."*

First Sign (Matt. 24:5) – FALSE CHRIST = First Seal (Rev. 6:1-2).

Second Sign (Matt. 24:5) – WAR = Second Seal (Rev. 6:3-4)

Third Sign (Matt. 24:7) – FAMINE = Third Seal (Rev. 6:5-6)

Fourth Sign (Matt. 24:7) – PESTILENCE = Fourth Seal (Rev. 6:7-8)
Fifth Sign (Matt. 24:8-9) – MARTYRDOM = Fifth Seal (6:9-11)
Sixth Sign (Matt. 24:29) – PHYSICAL CHANGES = Sixth Seal (Rev. 6:12-16)
IN SUN MOON & STARS

Once you identify the context of Matthew 24, some verses start making a whole lot more sense. For example:

24:13 – *“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”* Remember, God will be dealing differently in the Tribulation Period. Those who call upon the name of the Lord will not be sealed with the Holy Spirit as they are in this dispensation (see Eph. 1:10-14). They must endure to the end in order to be saved. That is, if they take the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:11-18), their destiny in the lake of fire will be forever sealed.

24:14 – *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”*

Wow, you hear this one a lot. “The sooner we get the gospel to all of the nations of the world, we’ll bring the kingdom in!” Whoa, whoa, whoa! First of all, we don’t preach the “gospel of the kingdom” in this dispensation, and if we did, we’d be asking for a curse according to Gal. 1:7-9! Secondly, the church has already been raptured by the time the 144,000 will fulfill this prophecy in the Tribulation Period. This has nothing to do with TBN’s claim that they are fulfilling this verse every time a new tower goes up in some nation of the world, or to missionaries carrying the gospel of I Cor. 15:1-4 in this age.

24:31 – *“And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”* Recognize that this is a rapture, but it is not the rapture of the church (I Thess. 4:13-17). This is a rapture of Jewish saints (Ps. 50:2-5) at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:11-12) just before the Battle of Armageddon (Isa. 26:20-21).

25:1-12 – This passage is another one people use to teach that a believer in the body of Christ can lose their salvation. A few simple observations can help. Notice that the context is clearly stated in verse 1 as “the kingdom of heaven.” We know already that we’re dealing with a strictly Jewish context. Those involved here are “virgins” (plural), not a “virgin” (singular). “Virgins” are found in the Tribulation Period, not the church age (Rev. 14:1-6). The Bride of Christ is a “virgin” (II Cor. 11:1-13), and is always referred to as one collective “virgin,” never “virgins.” The virgins in the passage do not “marry” anyone, they go to “meet” someone, and the someone they go to meet is already married (Luke 12:36).

Note in verse 13 that it is the “Son of man” coming as a married bridegroom, not the “Son of God” coming for His bride.

Wednesday – October 18, 2017

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 27-28

OVERVIEW:

The King's trial (chapter 26:57-27:26); the King's suffering and death (chapter 27:77-66); the King's victory (chapter 28).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Based on Hebrews 9:16-17, we will actually enter the New Testament in our reading today: *"For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."* That is foreign to our typical thinking, but as we've been learning, it is key to keeping our bearings in what we commonly refer to as the New Testament.

Obviously, today's reading is rich and full and running over with many things worthy of commentary. Because most of those comments you could make yourself, perhaps the best investment of our time today would be in discussing the time factors involved in the last week of our Saviour's life on the earth.

Traditionally, most have taught through the centuries, that Jesus died on what we call "Good Friday." The tradition was handed down, however, through the Roman Catholic Church. That, in and of itself, does not necessarily make it wrong (because they also believe in the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His bodily resurrection, etc.), but anything handed down through that church should always raise about ten trillion red flags! May I go on record that I absolutely love Roman Catholics, but I absolutely hate their church! To date, a full one-sixth of the world's population professes to be Roman Catholic. While this system refers to itself as "Christian" (the word Catholic actually means "universal Christianity"), they propagate what II Cor. 11:4 calls, "another Jesus;" "another spirit;" and "another gospel." That church damns people's souls to Hell, while they're thinking they "believe in Jesus." It is damnably deceptive, and that is the reason for such strong, and seemingly harsh sounding statements. (See Jesus' commendation of the church in Ephesus in Rev. 2:1-2.) Our hearts should truly break for people trapped in that system, and be constantly looking for and praying for opportunities to be able to love them past the blinders the enemy uses to hold them captive in his snare (II Tim. 2:26).

Back to the discussion at hand. The key problem with the death of Christ taking

place on “Good Friday” is that Jesus said in Matthew 12:40 – *“For as Jonas (Jonah) was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* (See also, Matt.16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:63; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:46; John 2:19). Obviously, if Christ died on Friday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. and was in the grave before 6:00, there is not enough time for Him to have been in the grave for three days and three nights. The way that most well-meaning people who love God certainly as much as I do, (and to be quite honest, are much more intelligent than me!) get around this, is saying that in the Jewish mind of Jesus’ day, any portion of a day was considered the whole. That may well be the case, and may well have been what Jesus had in mind, I’ve just always had a hard time with how specific Jesus seemed to be about the *“three days and three nights.”*

Instead of “Good Friday,” let’s consider a “Bad Wednesday” scenario, which I think fits far better. Don’t worry, I’m not the kook that “invented” this line of reasoning, and there are many who agree with this time line that has been suggested by Warren Wiersbe and others:

*Keep in mind that the Jewish day began at sundown the previous day (i.e. *“the evening and the morning we’re the first day”* – Gen. 1:5).

Fri: Jesus came to Bethany six days before Passover (John 12:1). Sat: Triumphant Entry (John 12:12-19 – *“on the next day”*).

Sun: Temple cleansed, fig tree cursed (Mark 11:12-18). Mon: Parables, questions, Olivet discourse (Matt. 21:23-25:46).

Tue: Preparation for Passover (Matt. 26:2 – *“after two days”*). Wed: Upper room events; Gethsemane; arrest; trials; crucifixion (Matt. 26:20-27:58).

Thurs: The Passover Sabbath, *“an high day”* (John 19:31); in tomb. Fri: Women brought spices when Passover Sabbath was past (Mark 16:1).

Sat: The regular weekly Sabbath.

Sun: Christ arose sometime after sunset that evening (remember, *“evening and the morning”*), and the empty tomb is discovered early Sunday morning.

Certainly, the most important thing is not what you believe about WHEN Christ died, but THAT you believe Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day. It’s just that this question surfaces just about every Easter.

Hopefully, this will help.

In light of the fact that the “Friday” time line was passed down through Roman Catholic tradition, be careful, because the 7th Day Adventists would like for you to believe that moving the day of worship from Saturday (the Sabbath— the 7th day of the week) to Sunday (the 1st day of the week) was also a tradition passed down through that false system, and that God never intended Christians to worship on Sunday, but on Saturday. The “first day of the week” as the God-ordained day of worship for Christians can be substantiated, however, by the following biblical reasons:

- 1) Because we’re Christians and not Jews. (Ex. 31:13 – the Sabbath is a sign between God and Israel)
- 2) The Lord rose from the dead on “the first day of the week” (Matt. 28:1).
- 3) The Holy Spirit came down on the first day of the week (Acts 2).
- 4) The disciples met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
- 5) New Testament giving is to be brought on the first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2).

TODAY'S READING: MARK 1-3

OVERVIEW:

The Servant presented (chapter 1); the Servant in action (chapter 2); the Servant assisted (chapter 3).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we were clearly able to see as we made our way through the Gospel of Matthew, everything in that entire Book was written to JEWS to present Jesus Christ as the KING. In perfect contrast, everything we will see in the entire Gospel of Mark is written to GENTILES to present Jesus Christ as a SERVANT.

Because the Gospel of Mark is written to GENTILES, it has several distinctive features:

- 1) It does not begin with a genealogy because Gentiles are not typically preoccupied with Jesus' lineage. They have little interest because they have no blood connection with Abraham or David.
- 2) It does not have an abundance of quotes or references to the Old Testament as did Matthew, because Gentiles are typically unfamiliar with the Old Testament. Mark builds his case not on "signs" and "scripture" like Matthew, but on the most powerful piece of evidence in a Gentile court – eyewitnesses (Mark 10:46; 14:3; 15:21; 16:1). It is also the only Gospel that gives an explanation of Jewish customs and teachings that a Gentile might not be familiar with (Mark 12:18; 7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42).
- 3) It is the shortest of the four gospels, because God knows that Gentiles typically have a short attention span, and are more interested in action than words (i.e. "action movies" are popular not because of their plot, but because of their action. Romans found it entertaining to go to the Coliseum to watch the gladiators — it's action!) Therefore, Mark emphasizes Jesus' actions more than His teachings. For example, whereas Matthew took three entire chapters to record the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Mark totally skips the Sermon which chronologically took place in chapter 1, and goes directly to the action that followed the Sermon.
- 4) It moves quickly and directly to the main event of the Book – the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which of course, is the main purpose of a Gentile

reader. Mark's emphasis is on being a citizen of the kingdom of God, not being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Note that 40% of this gospel deals with the last 8 days of Jesus' life. That is what is significant to Gentiles.

Because the Gospel of Mark is also written to present Jesus Christ as a SERVANT, it likewise possesses several distinctive features that reflect that emphasis:

- 1) No genealogy is listed in Mark, not only because of its Gentile audience, but because the record of the birth of a servant is unimportant and insignificant.
- 2) The key words in this gospel are "*straightway*" (19 times) and "*immediately*" (17 times). These are words used to describe the actions of a servant. A servant simply does WHAT he is told, WHEN he is told. The WORDS of a servant pale in comparison to his WORKS. It is interesting to note that it is only in the Gospel of Mark that the hands of Jesus are prominent (Mark 1:31; 6:2; 8:23, 25; 9:27). Hands are symbolic of the work of a servant.
- 3) The key verse in the Book portrays Christ's servanthood: "*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45).

Note that this verse also provides a perfect outline of the Book:

- The Servant's Work (chapters 1-10)
- The Servant's Sacrifice (chapters 11-16)

Though Mark clearly presents Christ as a Servant, it is more than apparent that the Holy Spirit directed Mark to emphasize the deity of Christ. At least five times the "*Servant of all*" (Mark 10:43-44) is referred to as "*Son of God*," "*Son of the Most High God*," "*Christ, the Son of the blessed*" (Mark 1:1; 3:11; 5:7; 14:61; 15:39). To confirm His deity, Mark records over 20 of Christ's miracles, demonstrating His supreme power and authority over demons, disease, death, and nature (1:21-28; 1:29-31; 1:32-34; 1:40-45; 2:3-12; 3:1-6; 4:35-41; 5:1-20; 5:25-34; 5:22-24, 35-43; 6:31-44; 6:45-50; 6:51-54; 7:24-30; 7:31-37; 8:1-9; 8:22-26; 9:2-10; 9:14-29; 10:46-52; 11:12-14, 20-26; 16:1-11; 16:19-20).

Friday – October 20, 2017

TODAY'S READING: MARK 4-6

OVERVIEW:

The Servant conquers a storm (chapter 4); the Servant conquers demons (chapter 5); the Servant sends out His disciples (chapter 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Because the narrative nature of the Gospels makes them relatively easy to understand, our comments yesterday focused on the “big picture” of Mark’s Gospel, and how it fits into God’s plan to present the Lord Jesus Christ “*to the Jew first (Matthew) and also to the Gentile (Mark)*” (Rom 2:10). Today we will center our attention on the unique authorship of this Book.

As in Matthew, there is no specific verse that states that Mark is actually the author of this Gospel. God did promise, however, to preserve His words, and that certainly includes the title of the Books! Utilizing the KISS principle (**Keep It Simple Stupid**), we know that Mark is the author because God said that this Book is “*The Gospel According To St. Mark*”! Because of the testimony of Papias, one of the very early “Church Fathers,” it is commonly believed that Mark received the eyewitness information from the Apostle Peter, who according to I Peter 5:13, had won Mark to Christ and disciplined him.

From the Book of Acts we learn that Mark is actually the surname of the author and that his first name is actually, John (“*John, whose surname was Mark*” – Acts 12:12, 25: 15:37).

He came from a Christian family, the first time that he is mentioned being in connection with his mother, whose name was Mary, who had opened her home for prayer when Peter had been imprisoned by Herod (Acts 12:1-2). His mother’s brother was Barnabus, which, of course, meant that John Mark was his nephew (Col. 4:10).

When Barnabus and Saul (soon to be Paul), returned from Jerusalem in Acts 12, John Mark accompanied them to Antioch (Acts 12:25). Later, when Barnabus and Saul were sent out of the church of Antioch on their first missionary journey, John Mark was included as a part of their missionary team (Acts 13:4-5). Not long into their journey, however, John Mark had had “enough,” and headed back home to “mama” (Acts 13:13). The Scripture does not say why he went home. Perhaps it was tougher than he thought it was going to be. Maybe the pace was

too fast, the persecution too intense, the demonic activity too freaky. Maybe he was just plain old homesick. For whatever reason, he went home, and Paul quietly determined, “never again!”

Sometime later, when Paul and Barnabus were about to head out on their second missionary journey, Barnabus had determined that John Mark would accompany them again (Acts 15:36-37). Paul looked at the WORK of God and said, “This work is too important to God to give him a second chance!” (Acts 15:38). Barnabus looked at the CHILD of God, and said, “This servant is too important to God NOT to give him a second chance!” Who was right? Your answer will probably be determined by your engiftment. Regardless, the contention between Paul and Barnabus concerning John Mark was so sharp, they decided to part ways (Acts 15:39-40).

But in time, something tremendously significant had taken place in this sensitive, mama’s boy’s life. In Colossians 4:10-11, John Mark (Marcus) was with Paul, and Paul calls him a “*fellowworker*.” He’s with him again in Philemon 24, where Paul calls him his “*fellowlabourer*.” At the end of Paul’s life, he specifically requests his presence, stating, “*for he is profitable to me for the ministry*” (II Tim. 4:11).

It may have been Paul’s rejection that arrested John Mark’s attention to see how serious God’s work actually is, and jolted him to allow God to change him into a faithful servant.

It may have been Barnabus’ ministry or consolation (see Acts 4:36) that carefully restored him, and gently groomed him into a place of usefulness and profitability in Christ’s service.

Or, maybe it was solely the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God working through John Mark as he wrote this Gospel that bears his name, revealing to him what true servanthood really is, as he was confronted with it through the life and death of his Saviour.

Or, it could have been a combination of all three things! However it happened, John Mark became a faithful, useable, profitable servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you blown a major opportunity (or opportunities) to serve the Lord in your past? Have you been prone to discouragement, and defeat in your service for Christ? Are you in need of a second chance? A third? Or even a fourth? Allow the restored, renewed, revived ministry of John Mark through this Gospel God used him to pen, to point you to the one true model servant of all, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Saturday – October 21, 2017

Reflection

If there is one thing that needs to be drilled into our minds and hearts, it is the fact that the gospel according to Matthew is written to the Jews. It is written to teach the Jews, revealing to them that the man named Jesus is the Son of God and King of the Jews. While the Romans meant it an accusation against Jesus, it seems they well understood what the Jews did not when the declaration was nailed to the cross, as recorded in Matthew 27:37. As stated in this week's reading, never forget the Jew when reading, studying, or meditating on the Book of Matthew.

The second thing to remember is the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are NOT interchangeable; they do not refer to the same thing or place. To clarify, the Kingdom of Heaven refers to the literal, earthly kingdom that Jesus came to set up on the earth but as "he came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:11) Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven did not take place because of their lack of faith in who He was. Hence, His death on the cross, which leads to the third fact about Jesus never to be forgotten: Jesus was not killed but gave up His life (Mark 15:37-39; Matthew 26:53-54), voluntarily. He spoke not a word of defense knowing this was His purpose, His mission, and His reason for giving up His home in heaven to be confined to a suit of flesh, having His glory hidden, as it were, by flesh and blood. Jesus chose to be born, chose to live, and chose to die a cruel death in obedience to His Father's will for Him. All He taught was what His Father wanted taught as He was wholly surrendered to His Father. How could He so endure such unimaginable suffering? Only one thing will enable such surrender: unconditional, everlasting, and unadulterated LOVE for the Father.

As humans, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Therefore, we cannot truly understand such love as Jesus had for the Father. The only way for Jesus to show or prove this love is by unconditional (expect nothing in return), everlasting (unending) and unadulterated (pure and without ulterior motive) OBEDIENCE to the Father's will.

In following the disciples through Matthew's book, we know that these in whom Jesus poured out His life, could not love Him in this manner, though they walked with Him daily, listened to His words consistently and literally breathed the same air as He, but they did not have the one thing (at that time) that Jesus had: the very Spirit of God within; they were not yet endued with His Holy Spirit power.

As we remember the Jew in Matthew's gospel writing, let us learn the principles that God would have us (Gentiles) to learn: the first of which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with your mind (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). We can only do this as we yield ourselves wholly and completely to the control of the Holy Spirit within, walking in His Spirit, and in accordance to the holy word of God.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

Matthew 22:29 "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."

Matthew 24:42, 44 "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

Matthew 28:18 "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

Mark 2:17 "When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Mark 4:40 "And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?"