**February 14 – Matthew 21**

Happy Valentine’s Day! Let me give you a brief picture of where what we are going to cover this week. All four gospels spend a significant amount of focus on the final week leading up to the crucifixion. Chapter 21 opens on Sunday morning (we celebrate this as Palm Sunday). Chapter 26 concludes four days later on Thursday night. This is the week that many refer to as “Passion Week.” The ministry of Jesus is no longer hidden in any way. He goes right into the belly of the beast to preach the truth to the religious elites in Jerusalem. As we make our way through the book this week, keep in mind that all of these things happened in rapid succession.

For our shepherding notes today, I want to focus in on three small parts of this chapter that are exclusive to Matthew.

**Zechariah**

In verse 5, Matthew quotes the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah, to show that Jesus was once again carrying out His foreordained ministry. None of the other gospels draw this same parallel. These citations are a common occurrence in Matthew’s gospel. Matthew is the only gospel that was sent to a primarily Jewish audience. That is why Matthew so regularly links for them to the Old Testament. These latter chapters of Matthew are absolutely dripping with messages that Jesus was speaking particularly to and about the Jewish religious system.

**The Two Sons**

The next unique section of Matthew’s gospel is found in verses 28-32. This simple story is another way for Jesus to reveal to them that God is not merely interested in lip-service. Anyone can say that they follow the Lord. But the proof is in the pudding. These people worshiped God with their lips. Why did Jesus curse a fruitless tree? Because it was a picture of the fruitlessness of the Pharisees that He was about to encounter. The tree promises to give something, but provides nothing. Back to the two sons. The second son promised to harvest fruit, but produced nothing.

Let’s be careful. The Pharisees are an easy target. Obviously they were focused on the appearance of religion without actually loving God Himself. But, let me ask, does that describe you? Are you more interested in the appearance of being a Christian or in serving the Lord because you love Him?

**The Kingdom Confiscated**

The final verse that is exclusive to Matthew’s gospel is verse 43, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.” Here Jesus reveals the outcome of a life of religious lip-service. May we be fruit-bearing Christians. May we never be those that praise Him with our lips and reject Him with our hearts.

For your encouragement: “We should ask God to increase our hope when it is small, awaken it when it is dormant, confirm it when it is wavering, strengthen it when it is weak, and raise it up when it is overthrown.” – John Calvin

**February 15 – Matthew 22**

One of the biggest differences between my experiences in Kansas and New York is the level of extravagance displayed at weddings. To be more precise, wedding receptions. I remember the shock that I experienced the first time I went to a cocktail hour and then realized that there was still a giant meal to follow. At first my heart was perturbed because I kept thinking of it as wasteful or unnecessarily decadent. Over time I came to understand more clearly that feasting can be a very good thing as we celebrate what the Lord has given.

We are going to find Jesus speaking in parables about weddings and wedding feasts. In the first part of Matthew 22 we find a parable that may appear shocking and harsh. Today I want us to consider the following truths about this parable to help us get an idea of what Jesus was saying and how we can apply it.

1. The Father loved the Son

The key to understanding this chapter is to realize that all the Father does (both in terms of kindness and judgement) is done because He love His Son. Keeping the bridegroom as the most important figure in this story will help you to properly orient your understanding around Him.

1. The Father was Patient with the Servants

The parable before us is a way for Jesus to explain that the Jews had been the exclusive recipients of the good news for generations, but when the time came for the Bridegroom came to celebrate the wedding, the servants refused to come. But, instead of instantly firing the servants, the Father went to extreme lengths to extend the invitation. He sent more servants. He informed them of the perks of being at the free party and gave them the menu of what would be on the buffet. But the servants still refused to come celebrate. Eventually, some of the messengers were even killed (this is probably at least partially a reference to John the Baptist). These murders reveal that the servants were not only ambivalent to the Son. It makes clear that they actually hated the Son. Otherwise the message of His wedding would not bother them in the least.

1. The Father Judged the Murderers

Interestingly, Jesus was speaking these words to the very ones who were plotting to murder Him. And the point He is making is that the Father in this parable has every right and responsibility as the ruler of this kingdom to punish those who kill the ones He sent. So, the Father sends troops to destroy the murderers and their city. I believe this is a reference to AD 70 when the Jewish nation was nearly eliminated by Titus and the legions of Rome. Those who continued on in Judaism, rejecting Jesus, experienced an outpouring of earthly judgment.

1. The Father Extended the Invitation

The picture here is that God graciously chose to deliver the gospel beyond the people of Israel. He sent the message to anyone and everyone who the servants could tell.

1. The Father Required the Guests to Wear Garments Appropriate for the Occasion

The clothing imagery here is one that the Jewish people would have easily understood. In the Old Testament, dirty clothes were representative of sin. The point being that nobody will experience heaven unless they have been made holy.

1. Many are Called, Few are Chosen

This parable makes clear that there are two kinds of people that will not make it into heaven. There are those who blatantly reject the message of Jesus. And, there are those who pretend to love the Son and will even attend His party, but they won’t do what is necessary to honor Him. The first type rejects the Son with their words and actions. The second accepts the Son with their words, but does not honor Him with his actions. Being that you are reading these words, you are likely not in the first category. However, Matthew has consistently warned us that there are those who claim the name of Jesus that will not stand in the judgement.

The question for you today is this, are you going to stand in your own righteousness, covered in the filth of your sin and works? Or are you clothed in the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ?

For your joy: Take some time to worship the Lord. Consider the lyrics of this song, particularly the second verse. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT34dAp3zKo>

**February 16 – Matthew 23**

Today we arrive at the most fiery sermon that Jesus ever preached. It has been called by some “the sermon of seven woes.” Let’s query the text a bit, shall we?

**What is woe?**

There are various ways that woe can be used. But, I think that John MacArthur accurately captures the manner in which Jesus employs this word. “Jesus used Woe against the scribes and Pharisees not as an exclamation but as a declaration, a divine pronouncement of judgment from God. As was already noted, it was not His desire that they be condemned but rather that they repent and come to salvation. But He knew that if they did not repent and believe they were doomed to hell under God’s righteous and just wrath. When God utters Woe against evil men He sets divine judgment in motion”

**Why is Jesus pronouncing judgment on the Scribes and Pharisees?**

Jesus refers to them as hypocrites. That word literally means, ‘an actor.’ It was someone who either wore a mask or painted their face to hide their true self. The seven woes progressively express various ways in which these religious elites pretended to be holy while not caring at all about the Lord. This hypocrisy is made worse by the fact that these same people were the ones who were supposed to be training others in Israel how to love and worship the Lord. Instead, they were extorting the people for their own gain.

**What are the other titles Jesus bestows upon these religious hypocrites?**

* Children of hell – vs 15
* Blind guides – vs 16
* Blind fools – vs 17
* Blind men – vs 19
* Blind guides – vs. 24
* Blind Pharisee – vs. 26
* Unclean – vs. 26
* Whitewashed tombs – vs 27
* Lawless – vs. 28
* Serpents, brood of vipers – vs. 33
* Murderers – vs. 35

**What is the conclusion of Jesus’ sermon?**

If any of us were to make a speech like this one, we would probably be riled up in fury by the end of it. Not so with Christ. Jesus concludes by lamenting over Jerusalem. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

For your sanctification: Take extra time today to examine your heart and see if there is any way that you resemble these religious leaders; actors, fakers, hypocrites. If so, repent. Some of the Pharisees did (Acts 15:5).

**February 17 – Matthew 24**

We have now arrived at the most controversial chapter in Matthew. This sermon is commonly called the Olivet Discourse. It can also be found in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Part of the challenge is that people generally come to this chapter with pre-established ideas about what the last days are going to look like. Then, they shape this chapter to match their ideas, whether they are biblical or not.

However, much of this chapter seems to be in reference not to the last days, but to the final days of the age of Judaism and temple worship. About 40 years after this sermon was preached, Jerusalem was destroyed and the prophecy of Jesus in verse 2 was fulfilled.

Since we are going to hit this sermon again from two other angles, let me just give a single truth that we need to remember.

Nobody knows the day or the hour of the return of Christ.

In the 1940s, many faithful pastors in the USA were preaching sermons suggesting that we had entered the final stage before the return of Christ. Before that, the Pentecostal movement was established based upon the belief that we were in the last days in 1906. Practically every generation looks around them and sees the sin and suffering and ponders whether or not we are about to experience the return of Christ.

Some have gone to extreme lengths to calculate or formulate an answer. Herald Camping, for example, claimed that Jesus would return in 1994. When that did not happen, he set another date for when he would be 90 years old, May 21, 2011. Over the intervening years his ministry spent over $100,000,000 advertising that Jesus was going to return that day. [To be clear, there are many reasons why we would reject Camping as a heretic.]

Nobody knows. The point is that we should be ready. Ultimately, the main theme of chapter 24 (and 25 actually) is that we should live in a state of readiness for whatever God has in store for us. Whether that means many more years of faithful service, or being called home. As verse 44 says, “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

For your kids: Here is an excellent song to help teach your kids about these things. (It is good for adults too.) ☺

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFKSABicXak>

**February 18 – Matthew 25**

Today we continue to hear Jesus’ Olivet Discourse. The main point continues to be “Be ready.” As we have so often done, let’s focus in on the part of the chapter that is unique to Matthew. Today that is the portion at the end of the chapter – verses 31-46.

Let’s begin with a couple of important clarifications.

1. Jesus is Separating Professing Christians

One of the parallels that can be drawn between the three sections of this chapter is that they are all three about how God will divide those who claim to follow Him. I think that sometimes people view the ‘sheep and the goats’ section as a way to speak those who follow Jesus and those who openly reject Him. In other words, they expect Christians to be the sheep, and atheists, Muslims, and Mormons (and many other false religions) to represent the goats.

That is not the picture being painted by Jesus. ALL of these people think they follow Jesus. ALL of these people are expecting to be in heaven with Him. But, just like Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, the fruit of the tree gives evidence to its roots. Some people will make it all the way through this life saying that they believe, only to be rejected by Christ at the judgment seat. True belief results in action.

1. This is not about universal welfare

There are some (especially unbelievers) who will use this text to say that Christians are not fulfilling their calling if they are not feeding the hungry and visiting those in prison and supplying goods to those in need. What people fail to see is that the scope of the ministry that Jesus is setting forth is His ‘brothers.’ (vs 39)

Consider what this looked like in Jesus’ conversation with Saul of Tarsus at his conversion. “And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’.” (Acts 9:4-5)

How was Saul persecuting Jesus? By persecuting the least of His brothers and sisters. Just as we see elsewhere in Scripture, our priority is to the household of faith. I am not saying that Christians should avoid displaying charity toward those who are outside the church. I am saying that this text is about how we love the church.

Once again, we see that one of the clearest evidences of genuine faith is a commitment to and love for the people of God. Those who do not regularly attend church or gather with the people of God are not able to do the things that Jesus is speaking about in this chapter.

For your prayer life: Here is a super helpful article to help us develop better prayer habits. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/prayer-for-beginners>

**February 19 – Matthew 26**

It seems like so much has happened in this gospel since we started Passion Week on Monday. However, most of the focus of this book has been on the teachings of Jesus during these four days. Now, Matthew is going to shift into the climactic event, the death of the King. Every single scene in chapter 26 is moving us meaningfully and rapidly to that moment when the Mighty Maker will lay down His life.

Let me highlight three simple things for you to consider today.

1. A Slave’s Wage

Just like Joseph was sold for a handful of silver coins, Matthew likewise tells us that Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. That was the common price of a slave in those days. No other gospel highlights this transaction that we find in verse 15. But, the main reason that I highlight this for you is that Matthew pays off the results of this exchange in the following chapter.

1. The Passover

In the Old Testament, God established various feasts and festivals for the Israelites to practice in order to remember what God had done for them. The Passover and the feast of unleavened bread overlapped with one another. The Passover was to remind them that God passed over their sins. Why? Because they had the blood of the lamb on the doorpost of their house. The wrath of God did not rest on them because of the blood of the innocent one who was sacrificed in their place.

Jesus, at the institution of the Lord’s Supper, was sharing a Passover meal with the disciples. Every Passover that had ever been celebrated was about to be fulfilled. This is why Jesus holds up the unleavened bread and says “This is my body.” Leaven represents sin. Unleavened bread represents purity. Yet, Jesus says that His body would be broken, like that wafer in His hand. And Jesus declared that the blood was poured out for the forgiveness of their sins. In this meal, Jesus fulfills the custom of the old, while instituting the traditions of the new. And what stands between them is the ministry of the cross that they both represent. The Passover looked forward with anticipation. The Lord’s Supper looks back in remembrance.

1. Sin and Repentance.

One of the most egregious sins that we can commit it to deny Christ. Peter denied Jesus three times this one night. After this, verse 75 tells us that he went out and wept bitterly. I wonder if Peter was remembering the words of Jesus from back in Matthew 10:33, “but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

But, notice what happened before Peter denied Jesus. In verses 30-35 we see the over confidence of Peter as he boldly declares that even if everyone else falls away, he will never leave Christ. But, Jesus responds in a way that I can only assume was very painful for Peter. He tells Peter in no uncertain terms that he will deny Jesus three times before the morning. There is good news in this for us. God is not surprised by our sin. He knows them. Yet, He loves us.

For further study: Here is a really helpful article about the meaning of the blood of the Lamb. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/blood-lamb>