

Bible Study Lesson Summary, Oct. 1, 2017

This Sunday, Oct. 1, your readings should be Chapter 21 of Genesis, Psalm 15, and Matthew 9:18-38 or the second half of Chapter 9 of the Gospel of Matthew. Don't worry if you are behind at the moment. You have a week to catch up because the next class is not until Oct. 15. That gives you two weeks to get to day 21 of the reading guide, which you will be reading on 10/15.

The Gospel of Matthew

Chapter 6: This chapter continues the Sermon on the Mount. Remember that teaching from on top of a mount means that He is really speaking as the Son of God in a very specific way. This is like Mt. Sinai and the Ten Commandments. The first part of this chapter, vs. 1-18, should sound familiar. We hear it on Ash Wednesday. Jesus is again making the Ten Commandments sound easy, for it is not good enough to keep our actions in check. We must keep our minds focused the correct way. So in 1-4 we hear that unless you have the right attitude you get no reward for almsgiving. You can't think, "I will give this person something but they are not worth it." This "attitude" would not read well in heaven when we can read minds. Then in vs. 5-8 we hear that our prayer must be sincere, and not just babbling on to nag God into submission. In 9-15 Jesus gives us a way of praying that is actually a way of thinking. The Our Father is far too loaded with meaning to unwrap in these notes, but do take notice that Jesus emphasizes the forgiveness part, which is hard enough without the emphasis. His thoughts on fasting is also a matter of correct attitude and not just for show.

The second part of the chapter continues with Jesus helping us have the correct focus. We must focus on heaven and what will get us there and not just think that we already live in the Holy Land, even if we are in Nebraska. The church clarifies that the biggest category of treasure in heaven, vs. 19-21, are the people we help to get there. One of my takes on the idea that the eye is the light of the body has to do with what we focus on. Our current sin of rampant pornography, pray for the souls of Hugh Hefner who just died, is what fills our soul with darkness because it has us look at people in a way that will not go over well in heaven. Are you noticing a theme? Vs. 25 clarifies our need to avoid greed, because it won't help us focus on God. And that is what vs. 18-34 are all about.

Chapter 7: We are still on the Sermon on the Mount. Vs. 1-5 have nothing to do with what the world wants us to think at this point. Many people don't want anyone to judge the actions of others. This is very clear in that it is only about not judging the person. This still fits the theme because we can't see into their minds and hearts like God can so they might be working on having the right motivation but just having a hard time getting there. We are all in that boat. Verse 6 has a comic named after it and it reminds me of an old saying, "Is nothing sacred?" The sacred is what would lift our minds to heaven, which is the right direction. We must keep that from being blasphemed. We have too many artists who do that at this point. Vs. 7-11 lets us know that this is not just good ideas from Jesus, but that he speaks for the Father who wants to help us. The Golden Rule in vs. 12 is the shortest summary of the teachings of the Law and the Prophets that I can think of. I think Jesus didn't give a particular percentage or number of those saved so we don't get stuck on the idea that "I just made it because I am better than SOO many, which would knock us right out of contention for judging others.

There are a lot of ways we have to worry about the False Prophets that Jesus talks about in vs. 15-20. If they make it sound too easy it is probably false for none of this is being presented as easy. It is a total make-over. All you have to do is think about some of our recent Saints like St. John Paul II or St. Teresa of Calcutta and you will realize how much many of us have to grow and change. None of this is something we can accomplish totally in this life, but you will not know that you have gotten there until you actually arrive in heaven. Vs. 21-23 let us know it is not good enough to

just talk about it or claim we have it because we know Jesus. The devil knows Jesus very well. Building on sand versus rock is powerful in several ways. One is just to look at the eventual safety of building on rock. Another is how hard it is to build that foundation because you have to be imbedded in the rock for it to help and that is not easy. Another is that to build on rock you have to be ready for the work and the time it takes. That last two verses of this chapter remind us again that Jesus is not just another teacher. He is speaking like He is God, which He is.

Chapter 8: The miracles that Jesus performs in Chapters 8 & 9 are to prove that He has the right to speak like He is God. No one else could do what He now does unless He has the power of God. He cures the leper with a touch and then tells him not to tell anyone. This is so He is not labeled as unclean for touching someone who is clean. Otherwise He would not be able to go into a city like Capernaum. In vs. 5-13 he extends His reach in the eyes of those following Him. He cures long-distance. Curing Peter's mother-in-law would not make Him unclear for there is no bodily fluids that can be transferred. The people did not know about germs back then. But they figured body fluids in the wrong place were a part of the problems. So a fever wouldn't be a problem. Matthew then quotes Isaiah in vs. 17. At this point I can clarify the footnote on this verse as written in the NAB St. Joseph Edition. LXX is the Septuagint or the writings of the 70. The MT refers to the Byzantine Majority Text, which some say is an older version of the OT. It doesn't matter because the Catholic Church uses the LXX almost exclusively for its reference. There is very little difference. In this case the word diseases vs. sufferings. Either way Jesus is trying to lighten our load. In vs. 18-22 Jesus is pushing people to let go of what is holding them back. That is different for each of us. Only God can calm a sea as Jesus did in vs. 23-27. That is why there were amazed. Driving out demons as in vs. 28-34 is another thing that only the power of God is able to handle. My thinking on why the people were nervous is that, if there were pigs around these were not kosher Jews and they might have been afraid that this would upset this powerful Man of God.

Chapter 9: In vs. 1-8 Jesus cures a paralytic to try to explain that He also has the power to forgive sins, which is also something only God can do because, even though we can forgive each other, we cannot forgive for God who is obviously offended by our sins. Calling Matthew in vs. 9-13 is pushing back Jewish barriers as to who God would be interested in saving. The fasting issue is another way He brings up the idea of being a bridegroom which is meaningless unless you know that God referred to Himself in this way in the OT. In Ezekiel God describes His courtship of Jerusalem in very intimate terms. The wineskins reference is about opening up to His new way of looking at things.

In verses 18-26 he ups that level of His power when He raises the young girl from the dead. When He heals the two blind men He wants them to understand He is at the point in which He wants to let them know that as the one with the power of God, He also wants them to believe in Him. Too often this is passed right over. We now have a similar quote: "In God we trust, for everyone else we want cash." I'm fairly sure the healing of the mute person is to show that this is starting to create a backlash. The Pharisees are not happy. At this point He starts to talk about recruiting help, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

The Book of Psalms

Somehow I skipped Psalm 6 in my notes last week. Think of Jesus praying this as He was held in prison awaiting His trial before Pilate, knowing that He was facing death, but He is already trusting that God will answer His prayer. Vs. 11; "My foes will be terrified and disgraced; all will fall back in sudden shame." This would only happen at the resurrection.

Psalm 8: This is one of my favorites. The theme could be summarized as: God is great, we are pathetic, but He loves us. “What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor....” Being fully human Jesus stands with us in this feeling. Being God Jesus lives it.

Psalm 9-10: This psalm looks at things from the perspective of God being outside of time. For it is only in the fullness of eternity that all this will be done. Jesus does come to fulfill this but only in the fullness of time. The footnote explains why these psalms are connected. “Each verse of the two psalms begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Obviously it loses that in the translation.

Psalm 11: This could be a prayer of Jesus as He carried His cross. The slings and arrows of the people’s words are killing Him but his confidence is in God.

Psalm 12: I hope you are getting the point that these are the Word of God and so are the thoughts of Jesus. Vs. 1: “Help, Lord (*Father*), for no one loyal remains; the faithful have vanished from the human race.” This seems to discount that Mary is sinless, but you have to remember that she also had to be saved. It just happened before her conception.

Psalm 13: This is a shorter version of what we will see as we get to psalm 22. Jesus could pray this as He hung on the cross.

Psalm 14: I love vs. 1: “Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.”” I heard a story about a judge who used this to silence a complaint in his courtroom against the celebration of Christmas. The person was upset that there was no holiday for atheists. The judge pointed out that there was, April Fool’s Day.

The Book of Genesis

Gen. 10: More explanations concerning the tribes living in the surrounding nations that can be seen as mankind spreading farther away from God which flows right into what happens with the next chapter.

Gen. 11: One of the main things to realize about this story of the Tower of Babel is that the destruction of human connections that came from one language being made into many is reversed at Pentecost when people of different languages could all understand Peter. The gift of the Holy Spirit reversed the curse.

Gen. 12: Notice in verse 7 that God gives Abram a homeland. They don’t get to stay there very long but eventually God leads them back to it. This is a foreshadowing of the people of God being promised a home in heaven. Notice the strange way Abram treats Sarai. The lack of the sacredness of marriage always causes problems, but there are no commandments or laws concerning this from God yet.

Gen. 13: Lot is the grandson of Abram and because of how well they are doing, they have to separate. Notice that the use of altars, as a way of making sacrifices to God, is already a common practice.

Gen. 14: Notice verse 18. This seems so insignificant but it is not. Melchizedek is the only person in the Old Testament who is both priest and king. He blesses Abram by sacrificing bread and wine. He is also the king of Salem. This is also significant. Salem means peace. Jerusalem means new peace. The New Jerusalem in the New Testament refers to heaven. This all points to the Eucharist. Notice also that the second half of verse 20 gives us the idea of tithing, giving a tenth of everything. Melchizedek comes out of nowhere. The question is who appointed him priest and the only answer is in that his sacrifice is accepted which means he has his priestly authority from God. The priesthood of the Jews would later come from family of origin. Jesus is a priest in the “order of Melchizedek” because he comes from God and not from a priestly clan. The Catholic priesthood comes from God through His Church not by family of origin.

Gen. 15: In the first verses of this chapter we have another image to help us understand God. Abram is an image of God. Abram wonders what good life is without a son. A son is everything for Abram. This lets us know God’s feelings. Not only does this foreshadow our knowledge of Jesus, but it also foreshadows the Mystical Body of Christ, which we become a part of by baptism. Notice this covenant, vs. 7-18, that God makes with Abram. Passing through the animals that have been split in two is saying that if I break this covenant, may what happened to these animals happen to me. The smoking brazier and flaming torch represent God.

Gen. 16: The story of Ishmael is the foreshadowing of those who are not born in a situation to be part of the chosen people. Abram loves Ishmael even though he isn’t part of those to be the chosen ones. God’s loves those who aren’t able to be Christian, through no choice of their own.

Gen. 17: Abram means the father of many but Abraham means the father of nations. In verse 11 circumcision becomes the sign of the covenant. A question that is sometimes asked is why this particular sign? At this time, this was considered the organ of life. Circumcision did not destroy it but was a sure sign of making yourself vulnerable to God’s wishes in terms of life. Circumcision is the foreshadowing of baptism, which replaced it as a sign of the covenant. In both old and new covenants, God wants an actual physical sign from us to prove that we are going to try and live out our part of the bargain.

Gen. 18: Abraham is setting a tone for generations of Jews in that hospitality to strangers is important. Any one of them might be a visitor from the Lord. These three strangers are welcomed and surprisingly one of them knows the name of Abraham’s wife. Two other things I love about this chapter is that it lets us know that Isaac means laugh, which Abraham and Sarah both do when they hear they would have a child in their old age, and also that Abraham gets somewhere by bargaining with God. I get this great image of a kid trying to deal with their parent.

Gen. 19: Notice that you see such an aversion to homosexuality and a dedication to hospitality that Lot is ready to offer his daughters in place of the guests. God, and His messengers, approve of this. Lot’s wife gets into trouble because she looks back, a sign that if you turn away from evil, you had better not turn back to it. Notice in verses 30-38 we see that God is not pleased with incest. We know this because the Moabites and the Ammonites were later enemies of the Israelites.

Gen. 20: Once again you have what looks like Sarah being left in a bad situation. But even though Abraham doesn’t seem to take very good care of her, God does. Sarah is an image of the Church.

No matter how dangerous a situation we seem to be in, He will protect His bride. God even makes her fruitful. But notice that God does not abandon Hagar and her offspring, even though they are not to be of the chosen people. So not being one of the chosen people does not necessarily mean you are cut off from God's love.