



MONDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 8:18-22

Plug In...

Two potential disciples are given pause by Jesus. Jesus scrutinises their impressive statements. The first says he'll follow wherever. Jesus cross-checks this man's level of commitment to such a lofty statement. At bottom, you up for the potential homelessness? The second man wants to follow Jesus but is torn by the pull of some serious family commitments. Jesus presses the man's steel; should it boil down to a choice between two options, which one?

Chew It Over...

"Talk is cheap". Maybe we should nuance the well-known statement to "talk *can be* cheap". On the surface, accepting Christ as Lord and Saviour is somewhat easy – easy to say at least. After all, complete forgiveness, an eternal heavenly destination is thoroughly attractive. Add in a few of the other elements to following Jesus and the stakes get raised: rejection by others (even family); suffering; taking serious financial hit to advance the gospel. Reflect further on Matthew 10:37-39.

In our zeal for people to be saved are we making clear the implications following Jesus will have for their life *now*? What things would you tell a would-be disciple of Jesus they are stepping into should they follow Christ on the Central Coast? Where will they take a hit that will test their resolve to long-term commitment to Jesus?

While Jesus does not diminish important priorities, for genuine disciples, he teaches that when it comes to the crunch of priority conflicts the priority of obeying Jesus *must* win out. What priority have you placed above Jesus recently? Think over where you've found your Christianity socially awkward lately – this could be illuminating.

Prayer Suggestion

May the Lord help us to carry our cross as we follow him. Pray to have security in the destination and to cope with any insecurity now while we wait. May the Holy Spirit bring to our attention where we have priority conflicts. May the Holy Spirit convict us and give us the strength and wisdom to make Jesus *Lord*. Pray further for wisdom in communicating the cost of discipleship clearly in our evangelism.



The Lakes

TUESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 8:23-27

Plug In...

Jesus has said that following him involves a cost. Given the tumultuous weather and turbulent sea the disciples very lives are at stake. This is the moment of belief and true discipleship. Do they believe Jesus has them, or, have they made a terrible mistake? Maybe this question would seem doubly pertinent if we factor in that first-century people commonly considered the sea was a doorway to a place called *Sheol*. This was where all spirits, demons, and the like, lurked! Some key words bring out that this is more than a storm in the mind of Matthew (e.g., v.24 is literally 'an earthquake storm'; v. 26 Jesus 'rebukes' as though something evil stands behind the turbulence; *cf.* the following story explicitly depicts a spiritual battle).

Chew It Over...

Given the likely spiritual battle going, notice how relative the power of evil is to Jesus' power. It is not two equal sides duelling. Rather, one side has complete control. Such control the opposing side is subordinate to a mere verbal command. Notice some other elements emphasising the power of Jesus. First, he can sleep and not worry. Second, the immediate quelling of the storm (the storm doesn't slowly dissipate, rather immediate calm).

No wonder the question: *who is this man?* We see that the disciples 'faith' is connected to their conception of who Jesus is? If you have a weak understanding of Jesus, the result is 'little faith'. The way to increase your faith is to know more *who* Jesus is. How can you go about digging deep into such knowledge of Jesus?

Prayer Suggestion

Ask God for opportunity and the determination to create space to get to know who your Lord is much more profoundly.



WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 8:26

Plug In...

The phrase “you of little faith” was previously used in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus addressed people’s anxieties and worries (6:30). In that context, Jesus is teaching that if we knew who our Heavenly Father is and what He is like, and what He likes to do, then we would trust with great faith even if things in front look dangerous, precarious, or life-threatening. In this context, clearly the disciples had a situation that normally would arouse anxiety and worry. Their response betrays a doubtfulness about Jesus’ (God’s?) intentions and willingness. Contrast Jesus’ faith. Such a faith that he can sleep. [You may recall David’s faith allowing him to sleep while surrounded by enemies – Psalm 3.]

Chew It Over...

How quickly we go weak at the knees when life slams us. This is the very context when our faith must rise to the occasion. Do we trust that the Lord is not far from us and will deliver us (even if that deliverance means passing through death)? If you sense your faith is ‘little’, now is the time to get acquainted with what the phrase “the *Lordship* of Christ” means. Search the scriptures, find out what *lordship* entails.

Prayer Suggestion

Lord build and encourage our confidence that you are Lord over *everything*. Next time life falls apart may you generate a faith in us that is courageous and surely trusts that you are not far away from delivering us.



THURSDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 8:28-34

Plug In...

This passage raises many questions. Why do the demons beg for mercy? Why pigs? Why do they run off a cliff? Jesus enters an area with demon-possessed men moving around tombs. Vividly, this is a 'land of the shadow of death'. In the book Isaiah, which Matthew just mentioned (8:17), the sickness of the land is symptomatic of the presence of demons (see: Isaiah 13:21-22, where the translation 'wild-goats' is literally 'demons'. Cf. Matthew 12:43 taps into this connection, that evil spirits inhabit wastelands. Further, the accusation about John the Baptist having a demon could be tied to John living in the desert [11:18]). Jesus comes to a region that is anti-God. The theme of death, demons, a people herding pigs (a fact which shows either they were outright Gentiles, or a people who had abandoned God's laws entirely shown by the reality of farming pigs) all strike the chord that this region is anti-God. Jesus arrives and a mini-salvation and judgment happens. The two men are saved from their demon-possession. While, the pigs are driven off a cliff to destruction. The people have come face-to-face with the threat of looming judgement or salvation. What do they choose?

Chew It Over...

When faced with the prospect of judgement, like the people in this story, our culture shoos-away Jesus. Somehow we believe 'out of sight, out of mind'. This passage should make us learn to see the land of Australia through a certain lens. How do we keep presenting the reality of God's looming judgement even as we may be howled out of town for doing so?

Prayer Suggestion

Praise God that Jesus atoned for our sins and in the process freed us from Satan's lock on our lives. Pray to Jesus, whom we have seen has the ultimate spiritual power. Ask Jesus to open the eyes of those whom you love that are locked in the shadow of death.



FRIDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 8:29 & Psalm 89

Plug In...

The demons spiritually perceive the identity of Jesus. They possess knowledge of God's timetable. There is an 'appointed time' when they know their run is up. Jesus sends the demons into the pigs and they drive off a cliff. It depicts the last judgement ahead of time.

Chew It Over...

The Old Testament expected an appointed day when the kingdom of God would break in and end history as we know it. To raise expectations of that day, the Old Testament is full of mini-judgement episodes *within* history (e.g., the flood, the conquest of the land). Psalm 89 is worth reflecting on. This is praise to God for calming the seas and crushing a monster of the sea (vv. 9-10). The psalm shows the enemies of God (even the popular idea of satanic enemies inhabiting the sea, i.e., Rahab) are judged. The judgement is the salvation of God's people. Reflect on what Jesus has displayed over the last few episodes. Jesus carries our judgement within history, before the end of history, in order to save us.

Prayer Suggestion

May we keep seeing the grace of God in the adjustment Jesus' work on the cross brings to God's timetable. Praise God that the end of history has happened to Jesus first on our behalf.



WEEKEND 19-20 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 8:34 – 9:1

Plug In...

Jesus deliberately goes on mission to this area – the Gadarenes. Sought out the sick and the demon-possessed. While the demons shouted at Jesus (v.29), with a mere word, “Go”, Jesus helps the people. They didn’t quite recognise what was going on, but they were worried. They asked him to leave. Jesus leaves.

Chew It Over...

This could be Jesus living by 7:6, “don’t throw your pearls before pigs”. On the one hand, Jesus actively seeks out these people. This challenges us to make sure we get *uncomfortable* and go on mission. Seek the ‘hard’ people, be eager to speak to the ‘unclean’ people, the ‘disturbed’ people. Who have you kept a wide-berth from? On the other hand, sometimes people will want you to just leave them alone. We must be proactive with sharing the gospel, yet not pushy or aggressive. We offer the hope, we persuade, but we may have to move on when the gospel is rejected.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask God as to who near you you've avoided or overlooked in engaging. Ask for grace and wisdom in doing this honestly and well.