



MONDAY 29 JANUARY 2018

SERIES: The Gospel of Matthew

Read: Matthew 15:1-9

Plug In...

This year at The Lakes, we return to the Gospel of Matthew.

The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law clearly desire to delegitimise Jesus' authority. They do this by charging Him with not obeying the elders' teaching. Jesus desires people to worship God fully and not themselves. With an example of an 'extra' teaching from the elders construed to cancel out an explicit command from God, Jesus delegitimises the Pharisees – despite them coming from Jerusalem.

Chew It Over...

Jesus plays brilliantly here. Note the command to honour father and mother connects with how traditions get used. Honouring traditions is often the way to honour father and mother, elders, etc. Heritage, tradition, custom is not necessarily bad. They often are practices designed to uphold good ethics. Yet, if things are worked in such a way that they cancel out clear teaching of Scripture, or excuse someone from love, then we are not worshiping God but ourselves.

Worship is obeying God's commands, which issue in acts of love towards God, and love towards man. If following a rule or tradition drains the action of love, then worship is in vain.

Think about the regular practices you do to worship God. What is the end result you honestly want from these?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank you God that you show us how to worship. Thank you for your words to us. Help us to obey. May our worship be *from* you, not something we've constructed.



TUESDAY 30 JANUARY 2018

SERIES: The Gospel of Matthew

Read: Matthew 15:10-20

Plug In...

Definition of defilement. That which disrupts relationship with God.

The Old Testament had many laws designed to teach that humans in their natural state are defiled. The food laws functioned as a little lesson in this every time one ate. It worked like this, one thinks about eating, the differentiating in clean and unclean food given (Leviticus 11), which reminds them that God looks at reality through the lens of holy and unholy. They should be reminded that they live with unholy sin and need God to cleanse them. The Old Testament food laws kept alive for them that they have this sinful heart issue to deal with.

Jesus appears exasperated that the religious leaders, even the disciples, fail to grasp Scripture's obvious intention.

Chew It Over...

The English Bibles sanitise Jesus' words too much. Jesus gets us visualising the daily movement. Literally, "Don't you realise that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and goes out into the toilet".

Someone reflecting on this Bible passage has said, "*The filth of the toilet is not so great as that of a human heart not yet cleansed*".

Verse 11 reveals our words are tied to the state of our heart (vv.18-19). Review some of the things you've said so far this week. Do this honestly to create a posture before Jesus and to find what you need to say to Him.

Prayer Suggestion

Admit to God the toxic nature of our hearts. Repent of what pollutant has come out recently. Humble yourself before Jesus seeking His cleansing of the heart.



WEDNESDAY 31 JANUARY 2018

SERIES: The Gospel of Matthew

Read: Matthew 15:21-28

Plug In...

Don't miss the stage for this story. The region of *Tyre and Sidon*, and mention of 'Canaanite' causes a, "Eeww, yuck!" to the Jewish minds. This is pagan territory, it's defiled (no wonder the disciples' response – v.23).

A 'Canaanite' woman begs Jesus for mercy on her daughter. Jesus is silent. When He does speak, He states, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel".

The woman kneels before Jesus: "Help me." The disciples command Jesus to shoo her away. What Jesus says next seems harsh. Yet, the story ends with Jesus seeing the woman's faith and healing the daughter.

Chew It Over...

Before thinking Jesus too harsh, pick up on the deliberate move Jesus has made. He *withdrew* to this 'pagan' and 'defiled' region (v.21).

What does this suggest Jesus is doing? How might Jesus be working His initial silence for a purpose (v.23)?

This is a little bit of reading, but it will help us see how the overall story of the Old Testament pieces together Jesus' self-understanding and what He is doing in this interaction. Explore: [Genesis 12:1-3](#); [Deuteronomy 9:26-28](#); [32:43](#); [Ezekiel 34:10-16](#); [Isaiah 49:5-7](#); [Isaiah 53:5-12](#); [Matthew 4:12-17](#).

Prayer Suggestion

Express your recognition you are included in God's people only through the love and mercy of God.



THURSDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2018

SERIES: The Gospel of Matthew

Read: Matthew 15:29-31

Plug In...

Look at what is happening to the 'lost sheep of Israel'. Many are healed. They give glory to the God of Israel.

Chew It Over...

Jesus is Israel and restores Israel, which means blessing to the world ([Isaiah 49:5-7](#)). Look at what happens to those close to Him. The blind see intricate detail. The lame begin to dance. The mute can tell that special person, "I love you". The deformed no longer hides from people.

Are you looking forward to these reversals when Jesus returns in His glory?

[2 Corinthians 3:18](#) asserts that because of Jesus we will be so transformed that there will be no barrier between us and God.

Prayer Suggestion

Allow most of the words uttered in prayer today give glory to God.



FRIDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2018

SERIES: The Gospel of Matthew

Read: Matthew 15:32-38

Plug In...

Nothing Jesus does is random. He identifies as one restoring the lost sheep of Israel ([Isaiah 49:5-7](#)). If we're attuned to what God has announced as His plan, we know that the work of the Servant restoring Israel results in all nations of the world flooding in.

The Sea of Galilee was where Israel became more blended with the Gentiles. It was towards the most northern end of Jewish occupancy. This is the location of the mountain where Jesus healed from and fed the 4,000 (v.29).

Chew It Over...

Read [Isaiah 25:1-10](#). Reflect on Jesus' mission, His interaction with the Canaanite woman, the mass healings on a mountain in the region of the Sea of Galilee, and now a big feed. What is Jesus demonstrating at this part of His life?

What does this story ask of us as readers? How will this direct the things you think, say, and do today?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank the Lord for His compassion in feeding us spiritually and physically. May we use the energy from today's food to propel us to share that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and offers the removal of death, and life forever, to those that trust He is the Messiah.



WEEKEND 3-4 FEBRUARY 2018

SERIES: The Gospel of Matthew

Further reflection on reading The Gospel of Matthew

Plug In...

As we've returned to the Gospel of Matthew, we need to remember it is one big story. Often as we zero in on the little stories within the big story we run the risk of missing much. The old problem of missing the forest for the trees. This week we saw Jesus seemingly treat a woman asking for help harshly. It seems abrupt and out of character for Jesus. Some have explained this passage as an example of Jesus trying to figure out the will of God. Some say Jesus was tempted to say something unkind because of the history Israel has had with Canaan, so He is silent for He's biting His tongue (after all He's just mentioned that what a person says comes from what is going on in their heart).

These odd interpretations come from only reading the story in bits. The first readers of this Gospel probably didn't have this problem. It is most likely that the entire Gospel was read aloud by a person to an audience. Hearing the Gospel in that big context meant that the audience would be hanging it all together as the big story unfolded.

Chew It Over...

In our busy lives we are geared to the 'bitsy-Bible-reading'. We miss so much. We can miss the one big point that, say, Matthew wants to tell us.

Challenge your time and carve out a space this weekend to read the whole book in one sitting. If that is a jump too far, then go for reading the Gospel in two chunks (chapters 1-15; 16-28). If not this time, do it sometime.

You could read with someone. Allow yourself to drop into the story flow, be a bystander watching it unfold, imagine the places, the characters. Read the entire Gospel of Matthew sometime so you can experience walking around within this moment when Matthew was first read.

Prayer Suggestion

Pray that we make time to allow God's Word to really seep into us, get down deep to our bones.