

SUNDAY

September 12, 2010

READ: Matthew 4

Matthew 4 comes immediately prior to the Sermon on the Mount. It is not a long chapter...so take some time to soak in the context from which Jesus will begin to teach in chapter 5.

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:

What are the significant events that take place in this chapter? What do you think Jesus was thinking about during his temptation and as he began his earthly ministry? Which disciples were called in this chapter? What message did Jesus begin to preach?

KEY CONCEPT: Following Satan's unsuccessful attempt to tempt Jesus, He begins His earthly ministry of preaching, healing, and calling people to follow Him.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: What do you make of Simon (Peter) and Andrew's quick response to Jesus' invitation to follow Him? They were with their father, but left immediately. Do you think you would have done the same? Why or why not?

Jesus was building up quite a following as he preached and healed. If you were living back in that time, how would you have reacted to what you heard or saw of Jesus?

Jesus still preaches from the Bible and heals as prayers are offered in His Name. How have you experienced Jesus in a personal way from Scripture and/or from a supernatural touch of His love?

PRAY: As Jesus began his ministry, knowing that it would ultimately lead to His painful death on the cross, consider His obedience to His Father, and offer up prayers of thanksgiving. Also, consider that perhaps God is calling you in some way to step out of your routine and do something for His glory. Ask Him to reveal that calling so that you can clearly discern what it is.

MONDAY

September 13, 2010

READ: Matthew 5-7

- These three chapters comprise the Sermon on the Mount. If you're short on time, skim these chapters, slowing to spend more time on the sections where the Lord speaks to your spirit.

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:

As you read, make a bulleted list of the topics that Jesus covers in this message. Jot a note about the ones that seem to jump off the page

KEY CONCEPT: Jesus lays out a framework for our values that runs counter to the worldly values that come naturally to us. We have a choice about which to follow

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Look at your list of topics from this sermon. Which of them are you most challenged by? Are there any teachings of Jesus that you disagree with? Any that you agree with but are struggling to live out? How can you submit your life more fully to the lordship of Jesus through what He has shared on the mount?

PRAY: Praise the Lord for revealing how He desires us to live through the preaching of this message. Share with Him where you are having difficulty with these teachings, and ask Him for more clarification where it is needed. Thank Him in advance for answering your prayers for help...and keep your heart open for those answers in the days and weeks ahead.

TUESDAY

September 14, 2010

READ: Matthew 7: 24-29

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:

Jesus is using a metaphor here to make His point. Recall building sand castles on the beach as a child. What do you remember about them that was good? What are the shortcomings of them?

KEY CONCEPT: Laying a strong foundation is of key importance for the long term stability of whatever is built upon it.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Think of the different building methods used in countries around the world. Some areas build upon foundations, others don't. Some use strong building materials, others don't have access to more than mud and straw. Recall pictures of developing nations after a hurricane/typhoon/earthquake/monsoon hits.

How strong is the spiritual foundation upon which your life is built? What kind of "building materials" is it built upon? Is this an area that you need to give some attention to?

PRAY: Ask God to speak into your heart this week, sharing His thoughts about where you are spiritually at the present time. Allow him to show you the weak parts of your spiritual foundation. As He does, ask Him to help you to replace those areas with a strong foundation that will withstand the bad storms of life.

WEDNESDAY

September 15, 2010

READ: Matthew 7: 24-29

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:

In verses 25 & 27, Jesus talks about the rain, the wind, the rising streams that beat upon the house. Looking at your life, what do those metaphors represent. What have been the challenges to the stability of your life?

KEY CONCEPT: In life, there will be storms that will do their best to bring down all in their path.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: You've heard it said that "it's not *if*, but rather *when*", usually referring to some sort of negative experience (hard financial times, bad health, relationship difficulties, etc.). What "rain/wind/rising streams" do you see on your horizon that may be preparing to come against your life? What have you done to prepare for these possibilities?

Read Proverbs 6: 6-8. The ant uses the good times of summer to prepare for the difficult times in the future. Have you been a wise steward of your time to prepare for the future? In what ways? (think: materially, spiritually, relationally, emotionally, etc.)

PRAY: If you have not done a good job of laying foundational preparations for your future, ask God to guide you in this. Open your ears to hear what He wants to tell you about all areas of your life...particularly about where you draw your strength from.

THURSDAY

September 16, 2010

READ: Matthew 7: 24-29

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:

This passage comes at the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). What was the reaction of the people to this message (see vv 28-29). How do you react to the teaching of Jesus? Are you amazed?

KEY CONCEPT: The people who heard Jesus were amazed because he spoke with the authority of God, not as one who had been given authority of men (their other teachers).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Authority is more than just power. It refers to a claim of legitimacy, the justification and right to exercise that power.

How do you process what Jesus said? Do you allow it to have authority in your life? What does that mean....how do you live that out? If Jesus does not have authority in your life? Why not? Have you taken time to earnestly investigate Jesus, and then decide what you believe about who He is?

PRAY: Thank the Lord for having come to earth to teach us in person about how to live abundant and God-honoring lives. Ask Him to help you live more successfully into the challenging areas of His teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere. Daily surrender yourself to Him in prayer.

FRIDAY

September 17, 2010

READ: Matthew 7: 24-29

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:

When the foundation of a building gives way, the safety of all the people living or working there is threatened. The builder, having cut corners (inferior building materials, slipshod construction methods, etc.) may have saved a few dollars in the short run, but with disastrous (and expensive) results in the long run. Have you ever experienced this in some way in your own life?

KEY CONCEPT: Inferior construction is dangerous and expensive in the long run

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: As a crumbling building puts its inhabitants at risk of physical danger, is there a risk of danger to a person or his/her family who has not built their lives upon the foundation of Jesus Christ? What kinds of danger might that be? What do you think are the differences in the family life of those who are "winging it" and those who are grounded in the Lord and seeking His plan for their lives?

Read Proverbs 14:12. Do you think that the "foolish builder" in Matthew 7:26 thought that his way seemed right? Are there things in your own life that "seem right" to you that may be leading to destruction of one sort or another?

PRAY: Psalm 139 finishes up with these words: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Pray that prayer today asking God to reveal anything that would be seen by Him as "building your life on sand." Listen for what He reveals to your heart...and allow Him to guide you to a better foundation

SATURDAY

September 18, 2010

READ: Matthew 7: 24-29

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:

What does Jesus tell us it takes to build our lives upon rock? (If you didn't take time with Sunday's or Monday's devotion to read Matthew 5 thru 7 - the Sermon on the Mount - do it now to answer this question. Or, if you already read it, review the list of topics you made on Monday.) Has the Lord spoken to you about any of these areas during the past week?

KEY CONCEPT: Hearing God's words, and putting them into practice, is the key to building a solid foundation for our lives.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Read James 1:22. Have you been guilty of simply gaining head knowledge from the Bible, but not living out the teachings of God that it contains? What is keeping you from living as you know the Lord desires? Is it time to surrender control of your life to Jesus?

Have you experienced the life transformation that occurs when we intentionally change our lifestyles or worldview and put our focus on Jesus' teachings, allowing Him to direct our life? What was it that caused you to turn over your life to Him?

PRAY: As you prepare to move forward in our Built to Last series, ask God to help you be fully open and surrendered to what He may want to speak to you about from each of the messages that will comprise the series. Thank Him for His great love for you, and for all that He will be doing in the weeks ahead to draw you closer to Him.

