*DEVOTIONAL*

March 19 - 24

*Palm Sunday*

**Monday, March 19 Matthew 19:16-30**

*“He went sadly away because he had many possessions”*

The rich young man’s wealth prevented him from entering the kingdom of heaven. From this we learn that one should be careful of the “lure of wealth” (see Matthew 13:22). This passage does not suggest that wealth is wrong, but it does suggest that there is something about wealth that can choke off the effectiveness of the gospel and keep one from entering the kingdom.

Transformation of one’s heart begins by exchanging the treasure of one’s life for the treasure of heaven. Jesus knew full well the controlling issue of the rich young man’s life – it was his wealth, which provided him power, significance, and status. Wealth had become the god of his life; it determined his values, priorities, and ambitions. Jesus called him to exchange it for following him in discipleship in the kingdom of heaven. The young man’s turning away is tragic, but it becomes a powerful illustration of the way we need to keep short account of what is ruling our lives. Even Christians can misplace their allegiance, so each person must be honest with himself or herself to know what is the treasure of their heart.

*If you are to be Lord of my life, Jesus, I can have no other gods. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 20 Matthew 20:1-16**

*“For the kingdom of heaven is like . . .”*

This is a parable of the kingdom of heaven, presenting the nature of God’s grace. The employer sends laborers into his vineyard all through the day as he finds them unemployed in the marketplace. At the end of the day he pays them all the same wage, for his compassion recognizes that it takes just as much bread to feed the families of those who had only worked a short time as it takes to feed the families of those who had worked all day.

Grace is extended to all alike. The story illustrates that not all respond alike to God’s goodness, but some compare and evaluate their own “goodness” and thereby fail to understand God’s graciousness. The fact that all of us alike are sinners places us together, without distinction or degrees of merit, in need of God’s gracious acceptance. The story answered the murmurings of the Pharisees who were indignant over Jesus’ act of accepting tax collectors and prostitutes into the kingdom. The words, “You have made them equal to us” in verse 12 echoes their discontent.

*I praise you, heavenly Father, for graciously accepting me into your kingdom. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 21 Matthew 20:17-19**

*“Jesus told them what was going to happen to him”*

The death of Jesus was not an accident. The confrontation with “the principalities and powers of this world” was inevitable and Jesus knew this. His going to Jerusalem was consciously a part of God’s movement in history to confront sin and provide redemption for sinners. When Jesus took the disciples away from the crowds to prepare them for the events that would happen, it became the third time in the gospel that he had spoken of his death.

Jesus added progressively new dimensions to the information. He had previously predicted his death and resurrection, then in the second reference he added the factor of betrayal, and here he added his knowledge that he would be turned over to the Gentiles to be mocked, scourged, and crucified. Referring to crucifixion added both horror and humiliation to the prediction. But resurrection continued to stand against crucifixion, preparing the disciples in understanding and hope. Their hope is ours, as well. In his resurrection is our assurance of eternal life, for he was crucified for our sins and raised again for our salvation.

*Dear God, in Jesus you fulfilled your plan for my forgiveness and salvation. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

March 19 - 24

*Palm Sunday*

**Thursday, March 22 Matthew 20:20-28**

*“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”*

The request for top position exposes the nature of selfish ambition. The disciples’ interest was in status and power, not empathy and participation in the suffering of Christ which he had just discussed. The conversation that followed emphasized the cost to the disciples in participating fully with him in his mission, seen in Jesus’ prediction that they would share martyrdom for the will and work of God. The reaction of the ten toward James and John showed their similar ambitions, giving Jesus the occasion to teach the meaning of true greatness.

The contrast between the way of rulers and the way of disciples is interpreted by Jesus through his own mission. To be truly great is to serve. To be in first place in the work of God is to become a servant for the enrichment of others. Here there are two kinds of love: love expressed as personal power used to help a weaker person, and love expressed as personal power used to help a peer or colleague. Both expressions are positions of service to the other, but the second kind may be the more difficult because it is affirming a perceived competitor.

*As a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, I will serve others in his name. Amen.*

**Friday, March 23 Matthew 20:29-34**

*“Lord, we want to see”*

This was the last episode of compassionate healing before Jesus entered Jerusalem. As Jesus left Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, the blind men kept calling out to him and the crowd tried to silence them. But Jesus stopped the whole procession to pay attention to these men in need. With compassion Jesus touched their eyes with healing, and immediately they were able to see.

The story is told of a poet and an artist viewing a painting by Nicolas Poussin, the French master. The picture represented the healing of the blind man at Jericho. The artist asked the poet to relate what he saw as the most remarkable thing in the painting. The poet responded by noting the excellent presentation of the figure of Christ, of the grouping of the people, and the expressions on their faces. But the artist pointed to the corner of the canvas where the painter had pictured a discarded cane lying on the steps of a house, and said, “Look! The blind man sat on those steps with his cane in hand. But when Jesus called him to himself, he was so sure that he would be healed that he left his cane behind.”

*I have come to you in confident trust, Lord, leaving my old life behind. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 24 Matthew 21:1-11**

*“The entire city of Jerusalem was stirred as Jesus entered”*

The Triumphal Entry, as it is called, occurred on Sunday, five days before Jesus was crucified. All four Gospels record this occasion and its significance. Jesus entered Jerusalem not on a white charger, but on a lowly beast of burden, not on a horse as symbol of power, but on a colt of an ass as a symbol of humility. He is the peaceful King of the people of God, not a revolutionary with political interest.

Note the care with which Matthew stresses identity: the identity of the location, the identity of a colt rather than a white charger, the identity with Old Testament prophecy (vv. 4-5), the identity in the cry of the crowd (Psalm 118:25-26), and the identity as the prophet from Nazareth (v. 11). Also note that the Messiah is referred to by use of the Old Testament quotation as a King (v. 5), with further reference to him as the Son of David (v. 9). A great part of the multitude spread their garments in the way and placed branches from trees before him in expression of royal honor (see 2 Kings 9:13), and he is hailed as God’s representative (v. 9).

*You came in peace and humility, Lord. We will minister similarly in your name. Amen.*