*DEVOTIONS*

January 2 - 7

*The Teaching of Jesus*

**Monday, January 2 Matthew 5:1-10**

*“Jesus sat down to teach them”*

To this point in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has announced his kingdom mission (4:17), called his first disciples (4:18-22), and conducted an extraordinary teaching, preaching, and healing tour of Galilee (4:22-25). Matthew now records an extensive message that develops in detail the kind of life available to those who respond to the arrival of God’s kingdom, traditionally called the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5-7. Leading off the Sermon are eight statements collectively known as the Beatitudes.

Matthew’s wording which specifies the audience of the Beatitudes is important. Jesus sees the crowds, then goes up on the mountain and sits down. Sitting down is the typical position from which a teacher in Judaism taught, a position Jesus takes regularly. His disciples then come to him, and Jesus begins to teach them. Thus, the Beatitudes can be understood as training in discipleship, becoming the first basic instruction for those who have made a commitment to Jesus and his proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom.

*I read and study your word, Lord, so that you may teach me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 3 Matthew 7:28-29**

*“Jesus taught with real authority”*

The teachers of the law were the legal experts of the Old Testament in Jesus’ day. Their authority among the people came from their expertise in citing Scripture and interpretations of its meaning. But ironically, their practices had muted the authority of the Old Testament because they added so many traditions and legal requirements that the power of Scripture was defeated. Thus, they could not speak with authority, for they had muted the Hebrew Bible, the only source of authority.

But Jesus has inbuilt authority, basing his teaching on himself as the authority for what he taught. As John writes in his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word became human and dwelt among us.” This is seen not only in his repeated declaration of “but I say to you,” showing how he fulfills the Old Testament, but also in his dramatic declaration as the judge of a human’s eternal destiny, “I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” Jesus’ teaching is so forceful that it clearly indicates he bears God’s own authority.

*You are my Master Teacher, Lord, and I will follow your instructions. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 4 Matthew 13:1-9**

*“Jesus taught them many things in parables”*

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus left the crowds to sit down and teach the disciples, but on this occasion he speaks to the crowd in parables. Later, Jesus will explain the parables to his disciples. By using figures of speech, Jesus arouses interest and curiosity and holds the attention of the audience by drawing on common experience. While the analogies or comparisons Jesus uses to make his point come from everyday experiences, they challenge the listener to search for the intended spiritual meaning.

That is why Jesus’ parables are often referred to as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” But Jesus’ parables are often deeply, even frustratingly, perplexing, because the story may take an unexpected turn and cause offense to the audience when personal application is made. As Jesus will make clear, his parables can function in different ways for different people, with dramatically different results. For the crowd they hide truth, while for the disciples they communicate truth.

*I am willing to hear, Lord. Help me to understand the truth you teach. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

January 2 - 7

*The Teaching of Jesus*

**Thursday, January 5 Matthew 18:1-10**

*“Become as little children”*

Jesus’ disciples have all sacrificed significantly by following him around the countryside these last two to three years, and they believe that greatness that comes from their human achievements and heroic accomplishments on behalf of Jesus awaits them in the kingdom. However, Jesus’ definition of greatness in the kingdom of heaven is far different from theirs, and he begins the process of teaching the disciples with a visual aid.

Jesus calls a little child and has him stand among them. He then makes a startling statement: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” They must be humble, like a little child, whose humility comes inherently from being unable to care for him- or herself. Those who wish to be great in the kingdom must turn away from earthly greatness through personal power, and in childlike humility call on God’s mercy to allow them to enter the kingdom of heaven. The child becomes a metaphor of Jesus’ teaching on discipleship.

*Teach me humility, Lord, that I may learn your form of “greatness.” Amen.*

**Friday, January 6 Matthew 28:18-20**

*“Teach these new disciples”*

As Matthew comes to the final three verses of his Gospel, the primary thrust of the whole book is summarized when Jesus declares that his disciples are to make more of what he has made of them. Jesus has come to establish the kingdom of God on earth by bringing men and women into a saving relationship with himself, which is called “discipleship to Jesus.” A disciple of Jesus comes to him and him alone for eternal life and will always be only a disciple of Jesus. The expression is virtually synonymous with the title “Christian.”

“Teaching” indicates the process by which disciples of Jesus are continually transformed through discipleship and the discipling relationship. *Discipleship* is the process by which a disciple (Christian) is transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ, while *discipling* is the involvement of one disciple helping another to grow in his or her discipleship. New disciples are to be taught the rudimentary elements of the Christian life, while more advanced teaching is given to mature disciples as they progress in the Christian life.

*Lord, I am committed to obeying all that I learn as your disciple. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 7 Colossians 3:16-17**

*“Use Christ’s words to teach and counsel each other”*

Paul affirms that Christ is with the Christians in Colosse through their ministry of Christ’s words. The worship of the early Christians placed a premium on the spoken word in contrast to rituals or mysterious ceremonies. Words are important. Through them Christ engages us, and we learn of his character and will for us. Faith comes by hearing, so the word of the Gospel must be proclaimed. And, having heard the word, a person responds by using words that declare his or her affirmation and acceptance of the Gospel.

Because of the importance of Christ’s words, we must be careful in our worship never to “dumb down” the truth of God with false efforts to feel better about ourselves. In order to attract people from our culture, some Christian churches depend on feel-good worship rather than on the strong, substantive declaration of the Word of God and its authoritative revelation for our lives. The danger is that worship becomes simply a performance that focuses on us instead of God. It may bring people to our building, but it won’t bring them to God.

*May our worship not be about us, Lord, but about you for the Word is yours. Amen.*