

Bible Reading Plan

WEEK OF JUNE 28, 2020

WEEKLY READING: MATTHEW 16-20
PASSAGES REFERENCED: MATTHEW 18:21-35

As we read through the book of Matthew, it becomes very clear where Jesus' values and focus lie. If someone were to ask you what are some of the key themes you have seen through Jesus' ministry activities and stories He told, what might you tell them? Here are some that stick out to me from this week's reading (Matthew 16-20):

- Your beliefs and worldview largely determine how you live
- Investment of your life
- Jesus follows God's plan and not His own
- Faith in God's power over our circumstances
- Submission to authority
- Freedom and joy found in child-like faith
- Everyone matters to God
- Being generous vs. being fair
- Living out God's undeserved grace to others

With so many great themes, it's difficult for me to pick just one. However, I think it's important right now to consider God's perspective on how He deals with people and, in turn, wants us to as well. Growing up, I was always taught to treat people fairly. If I gave one of my friends some candy, then I should offer it to the other non-friends standing with us as well. When you read the parable of the workers in the vineyard, how do you feel about everyone getting paid the same? For me, I don't like it. As parents, my wife and I often had to respond to a kid's complaint, "They got something I didn't, that's not fair." We would try to justify why things appeared to be uneven. When I look at this story through the eyes of an employee or employer, I don't like it any better – unless I'm the guy who works a couple of hours and gets paid a full days' wages.

The only way to get our minds and hearts around this story is to stop evaluating it with the world's standards. We would do well to apply this truth: *God's ways are not our ways*. In this story, Jesus is trying to help us see how much God loves everyone. He is not trying to give us a couple of tips on how to handle new hires. We love this approach when we are the person receiving more than we deserve. However, when it comes to us having to extend forgiveness, money, or time to someone we think doesn't deserve it, we often struggle. Why is this?

When we look around, we are conditioned to evaluate others: their dress, the car they drive, the home they live in, how their kids behave, their political bias, etc. Typically, what is more important to us in life are the areas we focus our judgment on – how people spend their money, who they hang out with, where they go to church, or if they go at all. Our brains get reinforcement when some person we have deemed less than us in whatever category struggles or fails at something. We may then consciously or subconsciously think that our way is better. This then puts us in a position to hold back on extending assistance, love, or grace.

Let's try to consider what is really holding us back. Yes, I understand that the base cause is our sin nature. However, I believe that if we can dispel the faulty thinking, we can be better prepared to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into responding more like God would when the circumstances arise. Reflect on the questions below. Be honest with yourself. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal hidden biases or lies you have been operating from.

- When you have the opportunity to extend kindness to a person you think doesn't deserve it, what do you think will happen if you go ahead and help them?
- Do you think people will not truly value or wisely use your help to them?
- Do you think Jesus enabled people to stay stuck in the problems of life? If not, why can't we show a similar kind of love and kindness towards people?

When I consider my personal hesitancy to help or love those I don't think deserve it, I realize I am playing God and somehow justify my lack of response. One of the ways we can grow in this area of our lives is to stop being concerned with whether or not people deserve something and quit worrying about the outcome. When God loves us, He doesn't consider whether or not we will be faithful in responding and always being thankful for His grace and provision. Go back and re-read the story Jesus tells in Matthew 18:21-35. Ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart and mind to respond more and more like our loving God does with us.

– *Scott Nieveen*