

# Daily Readings

Please note: Matthew 19 and 20 build on the teaching that Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount. As we move through these passages in 19 and 20 our daily readings will focus on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. The daily readings allow us to dig deeper.

**Monday, September 13 – Read Matthew 5:1-16.** Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with what we call the Beatitudes. These “blessings” are contrary to the world view that we face each day. As you read these, which ones are speaking directly to your life situation this week? Continue on the metaphor of light and salt in verses 13-16. In what ways is God calling you to be light and salt in your home, neighborhood, church, school or work?

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**Tuesday, September 14 – Read Matthew 5:17-20.** Now Jesus turns his attention to the law. He wants his followers to understand that the law of God is still necessary for the order of humanity. Jesus points to the teachers of the law as bad examples. They justified their selfish behavior by promoting “exceptions” to the laws or “justifications” for certain actions. Jesus is calling his followers to the full intent of the law to bring God’s creation together in peace and harmony. How have you justified your behavior today? Have you asked for forgiveness from God? Have you led someone astray by your actions or your words?

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**Wednesday, September 15 – Read Matthew 5:21-30.** These passages begin a series of examples of Jesus’ focusing on the heart and not just the action of a person. He uses murder and adultery as examples. In both cases, the avoidance of the behavior is condemned. But Jesus reminds his followers that not only does God look at our behavior, but also at our heart. We may not literally do harm to another person, but the anger or lust in our heart is just as offensive to God as it blocks our full relationship to God. As you go through your day, examine your thoughts and feelings. How would God measure your heart? Do you need to ask for cleansing and new beginnings?

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**Thursday, September 16 – Read Matthew 5:31-37.** The common practice in first century was to exaggerate. In marriage, unfaithfulness could be defined as something as simple as a failure to cook or clean. The resulting divorce would leave the wife unable to support herself since women had little means to support themselves. In the courts, as long as a testimony was “mostly” the truth, exaggeration was tolerated. Jesus is clear that the law is not to be manipulated for personal gain. How have you justified yourself before God today? Have you manipulated someone or some situation for personal gain at the expense of another?

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**Friday, September 17 – Read Matthew 5:38-48.** The question of how justice was administered was an issue in the first century. Position, wealth, and connections had much to do with legal retribution for harm that was caused against another person. So Jesus turns the legal system of retribution into a means of reconciliation. Instead of seeking harm on another person that might lead to an increase of hatred and future retaliation, Jesus suggest here that self sacrifice be offered as a means to stop the hatred and retribution that was so much a part of their culture. Is there someone to whom you are wishing harm? How can you turn the other cheek or walk an extra mile to offer peace and reconciliation?

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## STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, September 12, 2010

### Winners and Losers — *Not the Outcome, but the Effort (Week 1 of 3)*

**Matthew 19:16-22 — The Word from the Bible (New Revised Standard Edition)**

*Then someone came to him and said, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ He said to him, ‘Which one?’ And Jesus said, ‘you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall to bear false witness; honor your father and mother; also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these; what do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘if you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”*

#### God’s Definition of Success

Chapters 19 and 20 in the Gospel of Matthew deal with God’s definition of success and order in creation. We tend to look at life through the lenses of power and influence. We admire the rich, famous, beautiful and powerful. All of us come up lacking in some sense of the world’s definition of success.

In these chapters, we read the words of Jesus as he deals with a faithful, rich, young ruler. He was faithful to the law; he was young; and he had financial resources. In the minds of the disciples, what more could you need to get God’s favor? Jesus turns the tables here by asking for more. This confuses the disciples, and their understanding of blessings and God’s favor. They respond by asking a good question, *“Then who can be saved?”*

Three times, Jesus reminds his disciples in these passages that God looks at us through a different lens. It’s more about the heart, effort and commitment than the world’s measure of success. Let’s look closely at how Jesus deals with the rich young ruler and the confused questions of Jesus’ disciples in Matthew 19:16-30.

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#### Matthew 19:16-22

The meaning of eternal life is the first issue. Is there something more than just following the law? Jesus clearly points out that following the law is the starting point, but just being a good person does not equate to a relationship with God that leads to eternity. Jesus expands the question, *“Are we willing to give everything over to God?”*

Jesus begins by reciting the commandments. Notice that he adds to this abbreviated statement of the Ten Commandments, *“love your neighbor as yourself.”* The young man replies with supreme moral confidence: all these I have observed. Now Jesus proposes something that seems utterly impossible. Typically, a man of this stature would have not just a family, but several households that depend on him. The proposal that he sell his possessions and give the money to the poor is utterly discouraging to him. Matthew tells us that he grieving (literally crying or sobbing).

Though the request seems unreasonable, Jesus has reversed the value system of that society — and of every society since.

The highest good in this ruler’s life is not the conformity to the moral requirements of religion, but the possession of wealth. The rich young ruler cannot bring himself to part with the great possessions he holds so dear and fling himself upon God’s providential care. He lives, not by faith, but by holding on to what he has. Accordingly, he is not ready to enter the kingdom of heaven. It should be noted that Matthew treats eternal life (verse 16) and entering the kingdom as virtually synonymous. Eternal life here probably means not everlasting life, but *the life of the age to come*. The Greek word *aionios*, translated “eternal”, is related to the word *aion*, meaning “age.”

## **Matthew 19:23-24**

The comment made to the disciples is in keeping with the promise (from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5) that the poor are those who will possess the kingdom. Verse 24 presents a vivid image of the difficulty the rich man faces — that is the familiar comparison with the camel going through the eye of a needle.

The attempts to make this figure less grotesque have been ingenious. It has been suggested that it can be translated as *“it is easier for a rope to pass through a needle’s eye.”* A more romantic proposal speaks of a gate left open after the large city gates are closed, so small that the camel must have its burden stripped off before it can pass through. But anyone who has witnessed a camel arising or settling down and has heard its cries of complaint at changing its position will appreciate the irony in the notion that a camel could ever make it through the eye of a needle.

## **Matthew 19:25-30**

The disciples’ response is understandable. Salvation on these terms is humanly impossible. And Jesus agrees that it is. But it is possible with God, whose kingdom it is and who gives us the possibility of entering it by His grace, not by our merits. Human greed once more asserts itself when Peter asks what Jesus’ disciples will gain in exchange for what they have given up to follow him. The disciples just don’t get it! It is not about getting, its about giving.

Jesus continues by reassuring his disciples that there will be hundredfold reward for accepting the hardships and sacrifices that go with discipleship, and beyond the reward is the possibility of entering the life of the age to come.

Now Jesus adds the words that ring in the ears of the 21st century person, ***“But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”*** How can this be? What is Jesus saying here? Are our efforts to get “ahead” all for nothing? Notice that Jesus does not make this passage universal. The opening words, “but many” seem to indicate that Jesus is referring to more than just a reversal of fortunes and order in the world.

When we look at the words of Jesus in what he asked of the rich young ruler and the promise he makes to his disciples because of their sacrifice, this passage is more than just reordering society. God is looking at our hearts and intent. When Jesus says, “many,” one interpretation is that he is referring to those who are working for their own benefit at the expense of others. The problem with the religious leaders of Jesus’ day was that they justified themselves by their behavior, when their hearts were dark with little or no concern for others. These are the ones who will be last, no matter how many plaques they have collected on the wall. While the most insignificant self-sacrificing person who lives for others will definitely be the first in line when the trumpets of the Kingdom of Heaven sound.

## **The Dead Sea**

One metaphor that was helpful in Jesus’ day was the concept of living water. Living water was fresh water that flowed in and out of the natural ponds and rivers of the area. Dead water was water that gathered in an area (like the Dead Sea) with no place to flow and stay fresh. To this day, the Dead Sea is a body of water where the waters of the river Jordan flow with no where to go. Over the centuries, this body of water has collected minerals that keep anything from living in it. It is not fit to drink or provide life for any living creature.

In the same way, God’s blessings and abundance work in us. As we allow the blessing of God and life to flow through us to others, we become a greater source of life and blessing. Sin is the self-concern that turns us constantly inward away from others. The more we keep for ourselves, the darker we become until nothing can live in us.

# Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying. ***Remember... someone is praying for you. Have a great week!***

The following is to guide you in your prayers this week, as we remember “It’s not the Outcome, but the Effort.” It’s from *Praying in the Wesleyan Spirit*, by Paul Chilcote, and the scripture, prayer and hymn address the issue of Christian Perfection.

**Scripture:** Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal. – Philippians 3:12

### **Prayer:**

God of Perfect Love,

You call me to be perfect even as you are perfect. That is a monumental claim on my life. Despite the fact that this call to be completely conformed to the image of Christ – to be absolutely Christ-like in my life – is offensive to many, I will strive to open my life to the transforming power of your perfecting love. My prayer is that I might become daily more and more like Jesus, Your Son.

The perfection to which you call me certainly does not mean that I will ever be free from ignorance or mistakes or infirmities or temptation; neither is it a call to absolute perfection, for only your unconditional love is perfect in this sense.

Rather you call me quite simply to develop such a close and loving relationship with you that I would never want to do anything to separate myself from that love or withhold it from anyone else. You call me to be loving as Christ was loving, in every relationship and at all times. And if I live by your grace in this way, then I will always be able to look you in the face without fear and with love in my eyes.

So I pray sincerely that the blood of Christ might cleanse me from all sin. I know that you are ready to forgive all the darkness of my past and that you are able to fill my heart with your life-transforming Spirit. I know that Jesus is my advocate, a liberator who frees me from the bondage of my past and sets my course for a future filled with reconciling and liberating love.

I pray that you also free me from those thoughts and desires that are contrary to your love. I want to be clean, not only on the outside, but also inside. If I am to be like Christ, his love must rule alone on the throne of my heart. I want you to live in me and become the source of all my thoughts, words, and actions.

Purify me from pride, from self-will, from anger.

Grant me courage to press on toward the mark for the prize of your high calling in Jesus Christ, not because I can make it only my own but because you have made me on your own. Make me mature in him through the power of your Spirit, and perfect me in your love. Amen.

**Hymn** (by John Wesley)

To love is all my wish,  
I only life for this:  
Grant me, Lord, my heart’s desire,  
There by faith for ever dwell.  
This I always will require,  
Thee, and only thee to feel.

Ah! Give me this to know,  
With all thy saints below;  
Swells my soul to compass thee;  
Gasps in thee to live and move;  
Filled with all the Deity,  
All immersed and lost in love!

***Invite someone to worship this week. You will be glad you did.***

***God is doing great things through the ministries of Trietsch.***