

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 31
Matthew 21-25

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General Questions for Reflection

You might pick one part of each chapter and think about these questions.

- What does this tell me about God (including Jesus and the Holy Spirit)?
- What does this tell me about our world?
- What does it tell me about me?
- What does it say about following Jesus?
- Is there something here I'd like to learn more about?

Why not use these thoughts to shape your prayer today.

Monday

Matthew 21

This week begins with a powerful transitional moment, as Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Shane Claibourne, who has found the true purpose of both his circus training and his political activism in following Jesus, thinks of this scene as street theatre. Jesus powerfully uses symbols in the public square by riding a donkey instead of a horse. In this one gesture, he undermines the might of the Roman status quo, and opens the dream of God's peace as envisioned by prophets through the ages.

How can you help others to imagine another way to live?

How do you feel about expressing faith in public spaces?

Notice how Jesus' action isn't preachy, but attracts both engagement and questions. "The whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

Jesus heads straight for the Temple. Most of this week's reading take place in the temple, the heart of religious and cultural life at that time.

Tuesday

Matthew 22

The parable of the wedding banquet :

For each parable, we often select an account as found in one of the 4 gospels as the "best," and reread it again and again. By doing this, we become blind to the nuances in other versions. The parable of here has many similarities to the more familiar one in Luke 14:16-24. The differences are substantial, though, with different meanings. You may want to compare them.

Do you find anything shocking about this parable?

What might "wedding clothes" represent?

Give to God what is God's. I love Jesus' wit with his opponents. In this case, he makes me wonder "what on earth ISN'T God's?"

Wednesday

Matthew 23

From a chapter of Q&A in the temple, Jesus now moves into a scathing critique of the religious establishment. Seven Woes take the whole chapter.

While these critiques have much to do with the culture of Jesus' time, they certainly cut through our own pretensions and hypocrisy. *Open yourself to Jesus' words. Are there words here that challenge you?*

Amid the critique, there are also phrases that show the Pharisees doing things right, or at least half right. Look at verse 23: does anything surprise you?

The image of washing the cup is powerful (v 25,26). What does the "cup" of your life look like? How can you clean the inside?

I was struck by the final verses of the chapter. The "mother hen" image conveys a tender affection that seems out of place amid the "woes". There is also a resignation that the care will not be received. *Do these final 2 verses make you reinterpret the tone of the previous 36?*

What role does this non-narrative chapter play within the narrative of "holy week"?

Thursday

Matthew 24

Now we leave the temple. Jesus shifts gears from public conversation to discussions with his disciple, preparing them for what's ahead.

Apocalyptic language is hard to pin down in a modern sense. When I enter a poetic mode of reading, however, I find it very moving. I can certainly relate the sense of cataclysm, looking at today's world. *Are there words and warnings that stand out to you?*

For me, I find these words haunting: "...the love of most will grow cold..."

This whole passage shoves us toward courage and perseverance against terrible odds. By accepting the worst consequences (persecution and death) I believe the early church had a freedom that, in my status and caution, I cannot understand.

Do you need courage today? What cataclysm are you facing? Can the image of the "Son of Man" riding the clouds help you to face the turmoil?

Verse 34 puzzles me. We certainly don't know the day or the hour. But we must be ready, and not be fairweather disciples.

Friday

Matthew 25

Three parables. Again, think of these parables within the narrative. Matthew doesn't include the long parting conversations that we find in John's gospel. Except for the Last Supper, Matthew uses these stories as Jesus' last words to his followers.

Sheep and Goats

I once went looking through the gospels to find instances that indicated Jesus ongoing presence. I wanted to read about how Jesus would be with us even to the end of the age (Matt 28:20). Of course, we discover this in other parts of scripture. But in the Gospels, I found this parable to be the surest indication of how to encounter Jesus here and now.

Oh God: teach us to be fiercely faithful, loving deeply, with perseverance and smarts.

Lord: what talents am I tucking away?

How can I use what you have given me to build the world you envisage? Healing relationships, drawing out beauty, serving amid brokenness? What would you have me do today?