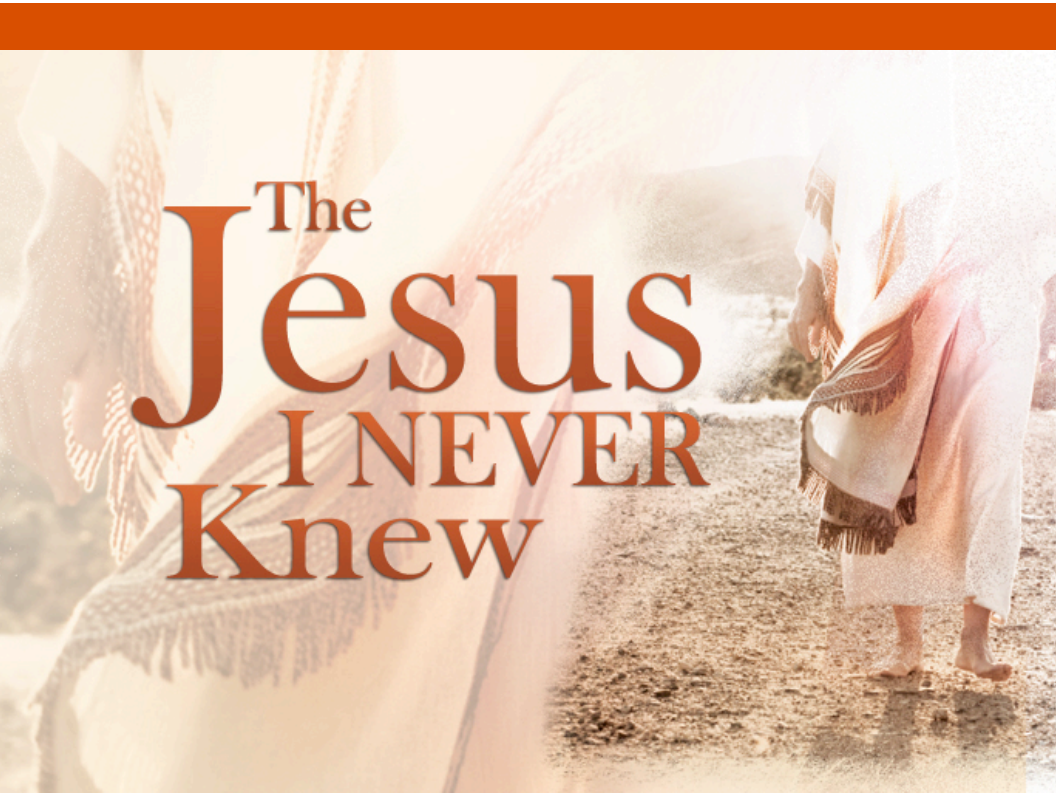


Weekly Devotional



The
Jesus
I NEVER
Knew

October 10-14, 2011

Questions

Matthew 22

1. In what ways does the opening parable of this chapter set the stage for what follows?
2. What groups sought to trap Jesus? What was behind their questions?
3. What two important facts did Jesus charge the Sadducees with not knowing? What might we not understand that could get us in similar trouble?
4. Think about verse 21. In your life, what things belong to God, and yet still must be given up to Him?
5. What does it mean to love God with your...Heart?...Soul?...Mind? What portions of your heart or your soul or your mind are the hardest to love God with?
6. What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself?
7. Why do you think we like to debate what the Bible means, yet often we resist changing our lives based on what it says? In what other ways do we sometimes try to sidestep our responsibility to God?
8. In what ways can our doctrinal beliefs be freeing and in what ways might they blind us to the truth?



Monday

Matthew 22:1-14



Matthew's gospel consists of 28 chapters. Almost one-third of it takes place during the last week of Jesus' life in Jerusalem. During this time Matthew records that Jesus was doing a significant amount of teaching, much of it concerning being prepared for His return. We also see the heightening of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. In this parable we see a little of both.

The parable begins with Jesus' judgment on rebellious Israel. Though God had called them to be His people, when He comes to them, they are too concerned with the things of this world to respond. They are distracted and have mixed priorities. They are not prepared to have their lives interrupted. The parable concludes with a warning to the church. Are we properly "dressed" for the return of Jesus? Jesus is the center of the story; it is His wedding that is being discussed, and discipleship is pictured as a joyous wedding celebration. In the culture of the day, wedding invitations were sent out and accepted. When the wedding feast was ready, a second invitation was sent. It was also customary for the wedding host to provide garments to be worn by the guests. The man in the parable who is not properly dressed has refused that which was provided.

Recently I heard a great analogy. A man felt great and was enjoying life. He went to his doctor for his annual physical. The doctor ran all the tests, called the man into his office and said, "You are dying; you have a disease that is killing you. But I have good news. There is a cure if you would accept it and partake in it." We are all dying. We might not realize it, but nevertheless we all carry around the cancer of sin and it is killing us. But there is a cure: the cross of Jesus and the acceptance of His gift of righteousness through the Holy Spirit. But we must receive the gift and actively live it out as we seek to honor Jesus with our lives. Where do you find yourself in this story?

Pray for those battling through life-changing circumstance—whether through an illness, a job loss, a relational issue or some other circumstance.

Tuesday

Matthew 22:15-33



“Four major questions arise in this chapter. The first three are asked of Jesus, the fourth by Jesus. . . . [The] orthodox Jewish father . . . [at] Passover . . . was questioned about the meaning of the Passover rites. . . . [Three] sons asked the father, in succession, a legal question, a scoffing question, and a conduct question, after which the father asked a fourth and final question on his own initiative.” Matthew, the Jewish gospel, follows this pattern. “Ever since these four questions and Jesus’ authoritative answers to them, the [wise] church, loyal to Jesus, (1) knows how to regulate her relation to state power; (2) knows what to teach about life after death; (3) knows God’s two major commands; and, finally and decisively, (4) knows the nature of the Messiah” (Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook*, p. 780).

Like the Pharisees, the Sadducees were religiously conservative. The difference was that they followed only the first five books of the Old Testament and were highly influenced by Greek culture. They saw the hope of Israel not in a resurrection but in the succession of her children. Here Jesus rebukes them because rather than seeing culture through the glasses of Scripture they see Scripture through the glasses of culture. Often I believe we too use Scripture to point out where our culture is wrong, but even more often I believe we pick and choose Scripture to read based on what our culture teaches us is important.

Our views of heaven often reflect what our culture values. We see heaven as one eternal vacation. Throughout history people have tried to describe heaven, but Scripture is actually relatively silent. Jesus does not call us to get bogged down arguing over heaven or about His return. He wants us to be more concerned with what He is doing in the here and now and how He is calling us to be a part of it. Satan will often seek to divert us into arguments that distract us. How might you easily get distracted from being available to God? Are you more concerned with the things of God or the transitory issues of our day?

Pray for the Shepherd’s Pantry—those working there and those receiving help.



Wednesday

Matthew 22:34-40; Philippians 2:1-11

The Pharisees and Sadducees hated each other. Given the previous encounter, you would think the Pharisees would be overjoyed by the defeat of the Sadducees. Instead, they were more concerned with defeating Jesus than knowing the truth. At Jesus' trial we learn that two other archenemies became friends because of their hatred of Jesus (Pilate and Herod). How easy it is to let our emotions get in the way of truth. Have you ever noticed that it is often easier to be friends with people when you are against the same thing than it is to be friends with those who share a common goal with you? I have recently tried to check my conversations and relationships when I find them centered on a common enemy. I have discovered that rather than being Christ-like, they often lead me down a path where Jesus would not want me to go.

In this encounter the whole of God's desires is boiled down to two sentences about love. Like the Pharisees, we often have lists of rules we believe others should follow. The Pharisees often argued over which laws were more important than others. Often these were what John Ortberg refers to as "boundary" issues. They are fences set up to show who is in and who is out. Jesus, though, does not heighten a list of negative rules that show who is not welcome. Instead He focuses on two positive commands: love God with your whole being and love others. This is simply stated, but living these commands out will take a lifetime.

I wonder what would happen if we constantly asked these questions of ourselves, our emotions, our conversations, our opinions throughout the day. Am I at every given moment showing love for God (having a heart like His) and am I displaying love to others as Jesus displayed to me when He sought me out while I was yet a sinner and gave His life for me? Or am I, like the Pharisees, so concerned with the "letter" of the law that rather than being inclusive I am exclusive? Yes, the way to eternal life is narrow; and yes, it requires that I wear the right wedding garments, but the garments are a gift. They are best worn in love. "The purpose of living is the adoration of God and the cherishing of human beings" (Bruner, p. 792).

Pray for all of the Wednesday evening programs at Glenkirk.

Thursday

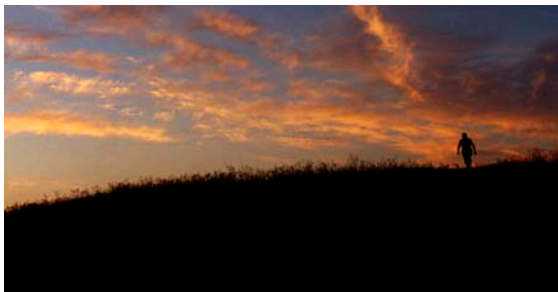
Matthew 22:41-46

It is easy to skip over these verses. After three questions from the religious leaders, Jesus goes on the offense. In many ways His question is the least interesting and yet it gets to the heart of the Gospel. We so often want to debate who Jesus is and what the Messiah should be like, but we never deal with the reality that He is Lord. In this exchange Jesus is calling the Pharisees to make a commitment. If Jesus is David's son and yet Lord, then all that Jesus has said is equivalent to being the "Word" of God. And if He is more than David's son, if He is also the Son of God, then when one looks at Jesus, one has an idea of what Father God is like. These verses, though easily skipped over, became some of the foundation points for later church councils as they struggled to define Jesus as both God and Man.

In the English we read, "The Lord said to my Lord" (v. 44). In the Hebrew the two words for Lord are different. The first is Yahweh, the Hebrew name for Father God, the covenant keeping God. The second is Adonai, which might be translated as "master" or "my master." Sitting at God's right hand denotes the highest place of honor and authority. In this passage Jesus is revealing His divine identity, but the religious leaders were not willing to change. Often rather than change we too argue; we seek loopholes or try the pathway of being non-committal. But Jesus calls us to a decision each day of our lives.

At the heart of the Good News is this question to each one of us: Who is Jesus? Our answer should change our lives. As Jim mentioned this last weekend, knowing Jesus should make everything else in life pale in comparison. It should radically change our priorities and the way we live our lives. How has the reality of who Jesus is affected you? Are you really that much different than your non-churched neighbor or co-worker at work?

Pray for those away at college, those serving in the military, or those in the mission field.



Friday

Matthew 23



Much of the material in this chapter is included in Luke 11 in what is called the “Sermon on the Plain.” All of the gospel writers to some extent grouped portions of Jesus’ teachings and activities together in order to make their gospels more meaningful and in order to fulfill their purpose for writing. Jesus probably taught on subjects like these more than once during His three years of ministry. Matthew inserts this material here because he wants the church to critique itself against false religious beliefs that crop up in every generation. It also becomes a fitting conclusion to Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees.

Notice how Jesus combines respect for those with authority while warning us to watch out so that we don’t follow their example. Coming after Jesus’ words about loving others, these words are challenging to us when we find ourselves disagreeing with others. It also raises the question: How often are we more concerned with our own comfort and prestige than being fully committed followers of Jesus?

It might be interesting to take the “woes” of this chapter and rewrite them concerning the church today. In what ways are we tempted to behave like the Pharisees? How often are we caught up in loving outward appearances when our hearts are far from being loving? In what ways do we try to do the bare minimum for God, or concentrate on keeping the details of the law while ignoring the larger issues of justice, mercy, and faithfulness? Are we more concerned with those overseas than we are with those in downtown Los Angeles? In short, Jesus was trying to show how one’s outward appearances do not always reflect the heart. How is your heart?

The great thing is that we are not saved by being perfect. We are saved by the cross of Jesus. Having said this, we are called to reflect Jesus to others through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Is there something the Spirit is saying to you that you are not listening to? Might Jesus be weeping over you concerning this?

Pray for the International Justice Mission, a group that works to free people caught in slavery and sex trafficking.



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