

Oct 8-14

Week 41

Our readings in the Gospels seem a bit choppy compared to the long stretches of Old Testament texts we have read. As you move from Gospel to Gospel, focus on each particular moment of Jesus' ministry. Watch for overlaps among the accounts as well as the special emphases of each Gospel writer. Also notice the very different approach the Gospel of John takes as compared to the other three Gospels. Notice the variety of people who came to Jesus and his responses.

Begin to grasp general characteristics of Jesus' ministry: the ways he presented himself as unique, the way he manifested the kingdom of God, the way he presented the law in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, the power manifested through his miracles, and how his miracles introduced teachings about the kingdom.

Day 1

Read Matthew 4:23-25; 8:14-17; Mark 1:21-39; Luke 4:31-44

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 3

These passages summarize the first phase of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the foundation of which was Jesus' ministry of teaching. He was bringing a message to Israel. His healings and mighty works met the practical needs of people and demonstrated the power of the kingdom Jesus was proclaiming. The kingdom was being manifested in both the teaching and the mighty works. It is also clear from these passages that Jesus sensed a call to the whole of Galilee and was laying a foundation for a ministry to all of Israel.

Ask God to open your eyes to fresh insights on the significance of Jesus' ministry for your life and for all humankind.

Day 2

Read John 3-5

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 4

Today we read about a series of encounters Jesus had with individuals. John's Gospel is more oriented to the province of Judea than the other Gospels, which focus on Jesus' ministry in Galilee (at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary examine a map of Palestine during the time of Jesus' ministry). The stories in John 3–5 began in Judea but then transitioned to Galilee at 4:43.

Notice today the emphasis on believing, a key theme in John's Gospel (you might want to underline every time the word believe is used). For John, belief was not merely agreeing with something mentally. It involved active trust, accepting who Jesus is, committing to follow him, and keeping his commands (see John 15:1-17).

As you read today, also notice how Jesus broke with the accepted practices of the day. For instance, a religious Jewish male would not normally speak with a Samaritan, a woman in public, or an immoral person; the Samaritan woman of John 4 was all three. Jesus inverted accepted practices in order to live out the Father's will.

Finally, in John we find both wonderful word pictures (like "being born again" and "living water") and very straightforward theological truths, such as "He was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God" (John 5:18).

As you read today, what is Jesus calling you to do in response?

Day 3

Read Matthew 8:1-4; 9:1-17; 12:1-21; Mark 1:40-3:21; Luke 5:12-6:19

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 5

We see in Mark and Luke the formal choosing of the twelve apostles, who would be official representatives of Jesus. Do you remember the twelve tribes of Israel? Jesus was reconstituting true Israel in his ministry, and the choosing of the Twelve was highly symbolic.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, a number of dynamics characterized his ministry. Jesus' ministry was powerful, demonstrating his authority; healings and driving out demons manifested the kingdom of God. Jesus broke with accepted religious practices of the day, eating with sinners, fasting, and ministering on the Sabbath. Jesus also claimed the authority to override such practices, some of which had been in place for hundreds of years. Notice the religious leaders' reactions. A major power struggle was brewing.

How do we react when God's Word confronts us about our comfortable religious practices that are not necessarily biblical?

Day 4

Read Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:20-49; 11:1-13

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 6

Matthew was written to communicate the gospel to Jewish people. Notice the parallels between the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5–7) and the Old Testament. This is Jesus’ interpretation of the law, given on a mountain, just as Moses had received the law on Mount Sinai.

The Beatitudes (see Matthew 5:3-12) focus on the condition of the heart and on how believers are treated by the world. Jesus and his followers were in the tradition of the prophets, who were persecuted, and who, like salt and light, had an effect in God’s name. Jesus’ sermon answers the question “How does someone live righteously in God’s kingdom, truly fulfilling God’s law?” Jesus centered on internal, heart dynamics in dealing with attitudes and actions. The religion of the scribes and Pharisees, which focused on outward show, wasn’t sufficient (see Matthew 5:21-48; 6:1-18). Trust God. Treat others well. Live by Jesus’ teaching.

Luke’s version of the sermon is also associated with a mountain, probably a plateau on the mountain. It includes some material Matthew doesn’t and, at the same time, is a more condensed version. Like Matthew, it ends with the analogy of two foundations.

How will you lay a foundation of rock in your life today, acting on Jesus’ words?

Day 5

Read Matthew 8:5-13; 11; Luke 7

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 7

Jesus' ministry attracted much attention, and in today's reading we see several people come to Jesus.

Matthew and Luke tell the story of the faith-full centurion of Capernaum a bit differently. A centurion was a Roman officer who commanded approximately one hundred men. Matthew's Gospel says the centurion himself came to Jesus. Luke's version has two different groups of intermediaries come on behalf of the centurion. In the ancient world an intermediary was received as if the sender were present, so the accounts are not actually contradictory. Matthew 8:11 shows that Jesus' vision for the kingdom included non-Jews.

John the Baptist, in prison, sent disciples to ask whether Jesus was really the Messiah. Jesus answered by alluding to passages from Isaiah (see Isaiah 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-6); as Messiah, he did not come to overthrow the Romans but to reverse the ravages of sin and death. Jesus, however, was clear about John's identity: he was the forerunner of the Messiah (see Malachi 3:1).

In Luke 7 a sinful woman came to Jesus as he dined with a Pharisee. Washing feet was a common hospitality. Notice contrasts between the woman and Jesus' host.

With what questions do you come to Jesus today?

Day 6

Read Matthew 12:22-50; Mark 3:22-35; Luke 8:19-21; 11:14-54

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 8

Notice that all three Gospels today include the story of Jesus' healing a man both blind and mute and the response of the Pharisees: "This man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24). Jesus' answer was that his driving out demons was a manifestation of God's kingdom (see Matthew 12:28).

But then he made a statement that has troubled many Christians through the centuries, speaking of the unpardonable sin. Mark gives the clearest explanation: blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is calling the Spirit unclean (see Mark 3:30), in other words, seeing Jesus' work by the Spirit as demonic.

Today's passages continue to clarify Jesus' uniqueness (see Matthew 12:38-42; Luke 11:30-32). He overturned common understandings of human obligations in favor of the kingdom, as with his response to the arrival of his mother and brothers. Luke 11:27-28 presents a striking statement. In response to someone's shouting, in effect, "Your mom is blessed to have had you," Jesus said the person who hears the word of God and keeps it is the one who is really blessed. As you listen to what God says to you today and choose to live it, you are more blessed than if you had been Jesus' earthly parent!

Finally, watch for the growing tension between Jesus and the Pharisees over how the law was to be lived.

How faithful are you to live Jesus' teaching when it overrides conventional loyalties and obligations?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 41

Jesus' first months of ministry exploded with evidence of the power of God's reign (kingdom) breaking into the old order. In John, we've read about two signs he did (turning water to wine and healing a paralyzed man) and two persons he shared the good news with: Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. In the other Gospels, we've seen the King's power over disease and demons, observed the controversies he stirred, and read his "inaugural address," the Sermon on the Mount.

Prayer/Meditation

Lord Jesus, I praise you for how you transformed those you encountered when you walked on earth. Thank you for your wonderful teachings. Lord, you set the standard so unbelievably high for those who have become citizens of your kingdom. Teach me to hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you have promised to fill me. Help me to be salt for a decaying world and light for a darkened world, as I seek to bear witness to the way you are transforming my life. Amen.
