

Oct 22-28

Week 43

We now come to the final phase of Act 3, scene 2, “Christ’s Ministry: God’s True King Manifests His Kingdom.” This week watch for several dynamics in the Gospels.

1. Especially in John symbolic language is used to describe the person and work of Jesus. Notice that these symbols are rooted in the Old Testament story and present Jesus as the climactic fulfillment of that story.
2. Continue to grow in your awareness of the importance of the cultural background behind these stories. For instance, you cannot read the parable of the Good Samaritan well without understanding something about the racial tension between Jews and Samaritans in first-century Palestine.
3. Watch for Jesus’ use of comparison and contrast in his teachings.
4. Notice the introductions and conclusions to Jesus’ stories or units of teaching. The introductions might offer the social setting of what is about to be said; for example, Luke 15:1-2 sets the stage for the parables on lost and found in that chapter. Introductions or conclusions can tip us off to the main point of Jesus’ teaching.

Keep your heart soft and open to the Lord as you listen to the Gospel stories this week.

Day 1

Read John 7-9

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 17

John framed his Gospel around the Jewish celebrations of various festivals. The reading for today has the Festival of Tabernacles as its context. This feast, which celebrated the harvest six months after Passover, was one of three that all Jewish men were to attend during the year (see Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 16:16). The festival also celebrated the deliverance of Israel during the years of the wilderness wanderings, and John's story focuses on three great symbols from that period, showing how Jesus fulfilled all three.

1. Jesus' teaching on living water recalls the water from the rock in the wilderness (see Exodus 17:1-7).
2. The emphasis on Jesus as the Light of the World echoes the story of the pillar of cloud and fire that guided God's people through the wilderness (see Numbers 9:15-23).
3. Jesus identified himself with references to God's name ("I AM"), revealed to Moses in the wilderness (see Exodus 3:13-15).

Also in today's reading notice the rich contrasts—between truth and lies, being from the Father and going to the Father, life and death, physical and spiritual blindness, and opposition to Jesus against belief in Jesus. At this point in the story, opposition was heating up. Finally, notice the repetition of the reflection that Jesus' hour had not yet come. This builds tension in the story as we move toward the time when Jesus would go to the Father (see John 13:1).

Have you ace any opposition in your life for identifying with Jesus?

How do you respond to the opposition you face for identifying with Jesus?

Day 2

Read John 10:1-11:54

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 18

Jesus' ministry continued to expand and face opposition. The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most familiar of the Gospels, but take time to notice the details. The Jews hated the Samaritans; Jesus' making a Samaritan the hero of the story drove his point home: everyone is your neighbor, even those you consider enemies, and you are to love them.

In the reading from John today, Jesus called himself the good shepherd, an image taken from the Old Testament. God was Israel's true Shepherd (see Psalm 23), and leaders of God's people could also be called shepherds (see Isaiah 56:9-12; Jeremiah 23:1-4). Jesus said he cares for his sheep, and they recognize his voice. Middle Eastern shepherds had an intimate understanding of their sheep and led them with commands or songs. Jesus also loves his sheep to the point of laying down his life for them.

The story of the raising of Lazarus shows not only that Jesus, who was going to Jerusalem to die, was deeply moved by his friend's death and angered by death's ravages but also that Jesus himself was the key to resurrection and life.

Listen for Jesus' voice today in his Word. How has he been the good shepherd to you?

Day 3**Read Luke 12:1-13:30****Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 19**

The themes in this section of Jesus' teaching center on orienting life to God and his ways, especially being ready at any moment to give an account of your life. Notice the contrasts and comparisons: the contrast between hidden and public, the comparison of people with sparrows or flowers of the field, the contrast between those who will be approved in the end and those who will not, the contrast between those who are prepared for the Master's coming and those who are not, and the contrast between narrow and broad ways.

The kingdom is dynamic (see Luke 13:18-21), growing and spreading like a mustard plant or yeast, but as it grows, it unsettles normal relationships. Jesus is a dividing line in life, and this disrupts things. Yet those who know him are received into God's kingdom where they are blessed, provided for, and set free from the wrath of sin.

What tensions has following Christ brought into your life? Have you been shunned or spoken against because of your commitment? Embrace these as normal for a kingdom person, but also celebrate the gift of being God's person in the world.

Day 4

Read Luke 14-15

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 20

Today we have another section of brilliant teachings by Jesus. We have now seen a pattern of Sabbath-controversy stories, in which Jesus clashed with the religious leaders over whether it was appropriate to heal on the Sabbath. The Old Testament law did not prohibit such healing; the Pharisees had elevated their traditional application of the Sabbath law, reasoning that healing was work that should not be done (notice that they never pointed to a passage of Scripture). Jesus pointed out their hypocrisy.

In Luke 14:7-34 each body of teaching deals with contrasting groups of people. First, Jesus interpreted Proverbs 25:6-7 on humility: the humble are the ones who will be exalted. This concept is illustrated in the parable of the Large Banquet, the poor and outcast being the ones who participated in the banquet.

Who can follow Jesus? Only those who count the cost and are willing to give up everything. His statement about hating family members is a use of hyperbole, strategic exaggeration to make a point. Jesus doesn't really want us to hate, but our love for and commitment to Christ will at times look like hate to other people.

Luke 15 has three parables on lostness. Notice that 15:1-2 gives the social setting of this teaching. In the parable of the Lost Son, the father represents God, the lost son represents sinners, and the brother represents the Pharisees and scribes.

At the end of the parable, who remains outside the father's house?

With which of the sons do you identify most?

Day 5

Read Matthew 19; Mark 10:1-31; Luke 16:1-18:30

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 21

One of the most difficult things for us to do as we read the Bible is to set aside our own cultural assumptions in order to hear what Jesus was really saying to us. For instance, in Jesus' teaching on divorce, we may have difficulty comprehending his message when we live in a culture that treats divorce lightly; in this way our culture is much like Jesus' culture. It is difficult for us to hear Jesus' teaching about riches when most of us assume we are not rich (if we have multiple sets of clothing, a car, and a home, we are rich by the standards of most of the world).

When we read, we need to keep in mind Jesus' historical moment. For example, in the story of the rich young man, Jesus was speaking to people who already saw themselves as in covenant with God. Jesus points out that covenant with God involves personal commitment and discipleship, not just being born with the right ethnic pedigree or socio-economic status.

Especially in Luke watch for clues to the main purpose of a passage. For instance, in Luke 16 the punch line in the parable of the Dishonest Manager comes in verses 9-11. Jesus was not endorsing dishonesty. Rather, he was saying we should use our resources wisely, for kingdom purposes.

Commit yourself today to listening to and living Jesus' teachings in a fresh way.

Day 6

Read Matthew 20; Mark 10:32-52; Luke 18:31-19:27

Act 3 - Scene 2 - Reading 22

At the end of the story of the rich young man in Matthew, Jesus commented, “Many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31). The rich young man illustrated that the “first will be last.” Now the parable of the Vineyard Workers illustrates that “the last will be first,” giving a wonderful picture of God’s elaborate grace (and the struggle some have with it). These inverted values of the kingdom of God are also seen in Jesus’ teaching on leadership, shared in response to the request made by the mother of James and John (Mark focused only on James and John, who were standing there with their mother). Kingdom leadership involves service, not domination or rule by authoritative position.

We also see today the third prediction of Jesus’ death as the story accelerates to that climax. Now for the first time Matthew included the manner of death and the involvement of the Gentiles.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all share the story of Jesus’ healing the blind in Jericho. Matthew has Jesus healing two blind men, while Mark and Luke focus on just one of the men, a man named Bartimaeus, according to Mark. Various explanations have been offered for why Matthew and Mark say the healing took place as Jesus was leaving Jericho, while Luke says Jesus was drawing near to Jericho. The Jewish historian Josephus explained that there were two Jerichos during this time, an older town on a hill about one mile from the main town of Jericho. Jesus could have been leaving one and approaching the other when he met the blind men.

Do you, as a child of your culture, really believe the first will be last and the last first? Do you live as if you believe this?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 43

As Jesus continued his ministry, the opposition steadily grew. They tried to stone him when he visited Jerusalem, and after his greatest sign—raising Lazarus—the religious authorities plotted to get rid of him. Yet he continued traveling, and even sent out seventy disciples two by two. His miracles in Jericho as he was approaching Jerusalem for the Passover represent his overall ministry: physical salvation (restoring sight to Bartimaeus) and spiritual salvation (transforming Zacchaeus).

Prayer/Meditation

Jesus, thanks for the way you love families. Thank you for caring for the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, especially in the presence of death. Lord, give me the same kind of faith that Martha confessed: “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world” (John 11:27). Lord, I believe with all my might that you are the resurrection and the life, and that whoever believes in you will live eternally. In your name I pray. Amen.
