



THE BOOK OF

MATTHEW

DAILY READINGS

MAY 9 - 13

Day 1 – To Whom Does the Image Belong?

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 22:15-22

The coin that the Pharisees' disciples produce at Jesus' request was a typical Roman one. Caesar's image was on the coin; each new ruler would mint new coins as one way of advertising their power and their importance. You cannot eat without Caesar. You cannot live without Caesar. It is Caesar who rewards your work. It is Caesar who defines worth and value. Let's look a little closer at that word 'image'. Another rather well-known use of the word image occurs back in Genesis when God creates man and woman "in his image."

Caesar's stamp is on the coin, his image is its identifying mark, so why not give it back to him? It's his after all. Where would we find God's image in order to give it back to him? In each one of us. Every person is made in the image of God. Everyone. No exceptions. Now, our sin and rebellion and arrogance may have marred that image; the harm we do to each other may have further fractured the image of God in each one of us. But that image is still there, it is still the fundamental, foundational reality of who we are, whether acknowledged or not: we are God's – all of us – and through the redemptive power of Jesus and the in-dwelling of the Spirit, that image can be remade and we can come to know the truth worth and value that God has invested in us. When we look at others, are we looking to see the image of God in them? Are we looking to love them as one of God's children? Are we seeking to create spaces and times and opportunities in which this God-bestowed image can show itself?

Question to Consider

How do we train ourselves to see the image of God in others?

Prayer

Lord God, teach me how to see all people as your children and to see your image in each precious person. May I seek to share the joy of knowing myself as a child of yours with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 2 – The Glory Just Beyond Us

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 22:23-28

First the Pharisees, now the Sadducees; each group wants to have their shot at tripping up Jesus and getting him to say something controversial, unpopular or dangerous. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. This life is it, end of story. In order to catch Jesus out and make him look ridiculous and ignorant, they concoct an extreme scenario in order to show the absurdity of resurrection. If marriage is supposed to be such a sacred and important permanent relationship (and for the continually persecuted and exiled Jews seeking to stay together and whole as a people it most definitely was), what does resurrection mean for those who were married several times? How does that work?

Jesus is trying to teach us something here that in some ways is beyond us and will remain so until we are actually resurrected and enter into the consummated fullness of God's redeemed creation. Resurrection life will be fantastic, amazing, more than we can possibly imagine (these are such weak, inadequate words!). New life is real, the resurrection is real. Death does not have the final word. There is a glorious future that awaits, and our petty quibbles and questions, and our limited understanding of what this might mean for human relationships cannot change this fact. There is hope. Death has been conquered through the cross and we can look forward now – as best we can – to eternal life in God's kingdom when all is fully changed and renewed, our relationships with each other included.

Question to Consider

How does the hope of the resurrection determine your outlook and influence your decision-making?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the resurrection and the promise that it gives to us. May we live in the light of its power as your true kingdom people. In Jesus' name Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 3 – The Living God, God of the Living

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 22:29-33

It is significant that Jesus quotes the self-description that God used multiple times throughout the Old Testament. God repeated his covenant promise to three generations: to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When God called Abraham he established a covenant with him, a covenant reaffirmed with Abraham's son Isaac and then again later with Isaac's son Jacob, making the Israelites God's chosen people. Now Jesus uses the example of these long dead patriarchs to illustrate the radical power of God to perform the most monumental transformation imaginable, one that hints at the stunning event to come three days after Passover...

We are often unmindful of God's power. In the middle of our ordinary lives, going day to day, it can be easy to forget the reality of the power of God. God does indeed have the power to raise the dead. If it were not so, he would not describe himself as the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Otherwise, all he is doing us pointing to his lack of power and his unimportance and pointlessness. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all long dead; but yet Jesus describes God as the God of the living not the dead. Why would God want to identify as the God of people long dead – unless they somehow weren't? Unless he has the power to bring back to life that which has passed away? Unless even death cannot defeat him? Do we know this power, this kingdom power at work in us, around us, bringing transformation and new life to places where hope is lost? Are we actively looking for it as participants in God's powerful recreation of his world?

Questions to Consider

Where have you seen the power of God at work around you lately? What is God doing near you that you could be a part of?

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, show me where your power is at work in my world. Renew my faith in your ability to change the unchangeable. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 4 – The Basic Question

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 22:34-40

All these trick questions have got us nowhere; he's wriggled out of every trap we've tried to set for him. He's bested our rivals. Maybe we need a different approach. What if we were to ask him a safe, traditional question, a question everyone knows the 'correct' answer to, and see if we can trip him up on that? So may the Pharisees have been thinking. So they pose to Jesus a fairly standard question, one at the heart of the Jewish faith, one the rabbis were always discussing and arguing over and defining and redefining: what is the greatest commandment? If you had to sum up everything about being a faithful Jew, a righteous member of the people of God, how would you answer?

It's a traditional question and Jesus actually gives a traditional answer. There's nothing fancy about what he says. It isn't controversial; nor is it designed to upend anyone's thinking or open up new vistas of hitherto hidden understanding. In fact, its purpose is to draw people back to the most fundamental aspect of our lives. It is to remind people that at the centre of the very reason for our creation, for God shaping us and giving us life, is relationship. First and foremost is our relationship with our Creator, and his desire to know us and be known by us. But alongside this lies our relationships with each other. Beyond the rules and structures and socio-cultural constraints, Jesus reminds us that the most important thing is our relationships. They are at the heart of who we are and what we do.

Question to Consider

How would you sum up the gospel for someone who had never heard it or considered God important?

Prayer

Almighty God, refresh my love for you and my love for others. Keep me close to empower me but send me out to love others and help bring them to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 5 – The Son of David

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 22:41-46

From a standard, traditional – but still profound – answer to a much-asked question, Jesus now adds something deeply controversial and divisive. One of the meanings of the title ‘son of David’ – and one that would have resonated with many Jews at the time – was the coming king who would defeat Israel’s enemies and lead her to her rightful glorious place at the head of the nations of the world. And by ‘enemies’ was meant those currently oppressing, occupying and ruling the land. But of course, such a viewpoint doesn’t match up with the summation of the law that Jesus has just reminded everyone about (not to mention that he has been saying since day one): loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbour too. Especially when Jesus is wanting to show that God loves the whole world, not just one group within it, and expand the definition of neighbour to the whole world too.

And Jesus is the embodiment of the Creator God who is bringing the saving, redemptive, healing rule of God to all creation. In the person of Jesus we do indeed have the Davidic Messiah, but one whose modus operandi involves love and welcome and sacrifice, not war and antagonism and dominance. The enemies he will ‘put under his feet’ aren’t the occupying powers or hated neighbouring countries. They are greater enemies like sin and death. His answer to the greatest commandment question shows exactly the type of Messiah he is going to be, and exactly the kind of son of David they should prepare for – and who we follow.

Questions to Consider

Why might Jesus’ statement have offended those around him? How does what he says show the type of Messiah he is?

Prayer

Gracious God, remind me again of your ways. Show me again the way you want me to carry myself in your world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Saturday/Sunday Notes

†† SOUTH WEST BAPTIST CHURCH
Redemptive communities and lifelong followers
