

Love Letters

Reading Through the Gospels



Reading Guide
Week #3

Matthew 13-18



NEW HORIZON
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Love Letters

Reading Guide for Week #3—Matthew 7-12

A Week in Review. What's your picture of Jesus of Nazareth? Meek, gentle, compassionate, a friend of outcasts and sinners? Certainly. But, far from soft-skinned and non-offensive, Jesus makes waves wherever He goes. His words part the crowds into followers and opponents. And He doesn't apologize or change His approach. There seems to be a cost to following Jesus.

This Week's Reading. Movement, with nowhere to lay His head (v.8:20). That describes Jesus' ministry. Mid-way through this week's reading, we find Jesus heading to Tyre and Sidon, the north-most point of His travels. And by the end of this week's reading He will head to Jerusalem for the very last time. Yet His travels are not aimless or random. Jesus always follows the Father's lead—even to a cross.

○ MONDAY—MATTHEW 13

Consider. Sowers, seeds and weeds—a whole chapter of parables describing the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus lives, teaches, and demonstrates the Kingdom with power and authority. Today, He uses parables to describe the intangible nature of the Kingdom to bewildered crowds. The disciples have to chew on Jesus' words—perhaps like us.

Read.

- In v.9, Jesus uses one of His favorite phrases: "*He who has ears, let him hear.*" Jesus' suggests there is more to His statement than face value. What are you able to "hear" beneath the surface of Jesus' words?
- Jesus' parables describe the Kingdom using the many different inherent characteristics of "seeds." What characteristics of the Kingdom does Jesus communicate using His "seed" metaphors?
 - Parable of the Sower, v.1
 - Parable of the Wheat and Weeds, v.24
 - Parable of the Mustard Seed, v.31
 - Parable of the Yeast "Seed", v. 33

Reflect. Jesus always seems to provoke a response from His listeners. Today's crowd is

first "amazed" (v.54), then they take offense at Him (v.57). How can Jesus both amaze and offend at the same time? Do His teachings ever do that to you?

○ TUESDAY—MATTHEW 14

Consider. Being Savior of the world is a full-time job: Teaching, preaching, healing, answering opposition, etc. And Jesus, the Son of Man, bears all this on His heart. At the news of John the Baptist's beheading, Jesus seeks some time to be alone with His Father. But the crowds are relentless everywhere He goes. And, as the compassionate Savior He is, He meets them and tends to their needs. Jesus never stops giving.

Read.

- v.1 is a historical marker, drawing Jesus into human history and chronicling His ministry. This is Herod Antipas, whose father, Herod the Great, conspired with the Magi after Jesus' birth. In this story, Herod is swayed by the opinion of others—even to the point of rejecting God's purposes for him. Ever happen to you?
- v.31 contains an important word: "*doubt*". This word means "of two minds". Peter's doubt does not make him Jesus' opponent. For the moment he is simply "double-minded"—he doesn't fully comprehend the scope and magnitude of Christ. Sound familiar?

Reflect. V.33 is a turning point in the Gospel: "*Truly You are the Son of God!*" To this point we've been told by the narrator (v.2:15), by the Father (v.3:17), by the devil (v.4:3,6) and by demons (v.8:29). Now we've heard it from His followers. They are convinced. And in response, they worship Jesus. Has Matthew's story convinced you? If so, what is your response?

○ WEDNESDAY—MATTHEW 15

Consider. In yesterday's reading, the disciples are beginning to believe. Conversely, today's reading begins with a confrontation by ardent unbelievers—the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Just as commoners come from miles to hear Him, Jesus' opponents have traveled all the

way from Jerusalem (v.1) to make their stand. Jesus is apparently causing quite a stir...

Read.

- Today's reading contrasts three different levels of understanding among Jesus' hearers: the Pharisees oppose Jesus; the disciples are "dull" of understanding (v.16); and the Gentile women understands and receives (v.28). Why do you suppose some understand and others don't? What are ways we can grow in our understanding?
- v. 31 is critical. Following Jesus' miracles, the crowds "praise the God of Israel." The crowds begin to recognize God as the Source of Jesus' authority and power, but the Pharisees refuse. How do you see both of these views reflected in our culture today?

Reflect. In v.13, Jesus bumps heads with the Pharisees. They honor their religious customs, rituals, and traditions over the Laws of God. Do you suppose you hold religious beliefs or practices that are not Biblically grounded? How would you know or recognize these things?

○ **THURSDAY—MATTHEW 16**

Consider. Perceptions of Jesus are on a sliding scale: the Pharisees are missing it; the commoners are acknowledging God, and the disciples are beginning to perceive Jesus as the Christ. However, contrast Peter's confession in v.16 with his response to Jesus in v.22. Peter both "gets it" and misses it at the same time. It seems that growing in our understanding will require our constant attention.

Read.

- v.18 is a foundational text. What, specifically, is the "rock" on which Jesus will build His Church?
- In v.23, Jesus looks Peter in the eyes and addresses the devil. Even though Peter has Jesus' best interests in mind, his instincts are misguided. How can we insure that our everyday responses align themselves with God's perspective?

Reflect. Think about Peter's confession in v. 16, and Jesus' response in v.17. Consider your walk with Christ. In light of these Scriptures, how do

you see God behind the scenes, revealing Himself to you?

○ **FRIDAY—MATTHEW 17**

Consider. Today we read of the Transfiguration. Interestingly, this story is located just past the center point of the Book of Matthew, and marks a dramatic turn in Jesus' ministry. To date, Jesus has been ministering to the masses and establishing His credibility with miracles. Today He will descend from the Mount of Transfiguration and begin His journey to Jerusalem and His cross.

Read.

- Reflect on v.2: "*There He was transfigured before them.*" The writer is not present. If the writer was not always an eye witness, what was his source for this information? How does this perspective inform your understanding about the nature of Scripture?
- The story in vv. 24-27 is unique to Matthew—the coin in the mouth of a fish. Rather than offend or argue, Jesus and His disciples pay their taxes. Jesus' objective—the cross—is of much greater importance. What are times in your life when smaller issues create a diversion from the most important matters?

Reflect. Jesus seems amazed by His disciples' lack of faith, even after all they've experienced. Jesus' response in v.21 is profound: in matters of the Kingdom, "*Nothing will be impossible for you.*" Consider the effectiveness of Christ's Church today. From God's perspective, what might be His evaluation of our results? Of your influence as a Christian?

○ **SATURDAY—MATTHEW 18**

Consider. In chapter 18, Jesus describes the posture of the *community* of believers instead of the individual. The Kingdom Community is humble like a child, and careful to live in purity. They are unified in finding the lost, and extend forgiveness to one another. In this posture, believers find Jesus in their midst.

Read.

- v.7 affirms the temptations all around. However, it holds us responsible for our actions. In other words, we can't blame anything or others for our sin. Do you ever justify or make excuses for yourself?
- Christians might feel that, as children of God, they hold God's greatest attention. Yet, in vv.10-14, God seems happiest about the newly found. If that is true, where do you suppose God would have us focus our best time and energy?

Reflect. Scripture teaches that there are prerequisites for the forgiveness of our sin—we must *repent* and *place our faith* in Jesus' death on our behalf. v.35 offers yet another prerequisite: "*Forgive your brother from your heart.*" Our sin is forgiven as we forgive others. Are there areas in your life in which God's forgiveness is hindered because you have not forgiven someone else?

Notes:



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