

# Love Letters

Reading Through the Gospels



Reading Guide  
Week #4

Matthew 19-24



NEW HORIZON  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Love Letters Week #4—Matthew 19-24

**A Week in Review.** As we follow Jesus, listen to His words and consider His manner of life, His credibility is growing. He is consistent with His message and His love for His followers. And they're beginning to understand. However, it won't be until after His Resurrection that they'll be able to put the pieces together. Jesus is sowing seed in their hearts for that day.

**This Week's Reading.** Last week Jesus experienced "Transfiguration" (ch.17), and the Gospel writer begins to chronicle Jesus' final walk to Jerusalem. Jesus continues to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God and predict His impending death. We will watch Him ride triumphantly into Jerusalem for His week of Passion.

### ○ MONDAY—MATTHEW 19

**Consider.** Today's reading marks a substantial shift in the narrative: Jesus leaves His home of Galilee and travels south into Judea. This is the first mention of Judea since chapter 4. Jesus has traveled full-circle, and His life will end on a cross less than 10 miles from the manger in which He was born.

#### **Read.**

- Jesus addresses a tough nut: divorce. Jesus affirms God's design for marriage from Genesis (vv.4-5), then adds His own commentary, found only on the lips of Jesus: "what God has joined together, let man not separate" (v.6). Jesus seems to be acknowledging divorce as evidence of human brokenness and need for God. Are you, like Jesus, able to sense the hurt in those whose marriages have suffered?
- In vv. 16 & ff., Jesus corrects a common misunderstanding: "good deeds" don't insure eternal life. "Entering into life" comes with surrendering and following Jesus. Jesus' response sends the man away grieving. Can you relate?

**Reflect.** In v. 28, Jesus speaks "eschatologically," meaning, He is speaking about the end of the age. Jesus dramatically enlarges the scope of His life and teaching, helping us understand that following Jesus has

ramification in this life, *and* sets the course of our eternity. How does this "eschatological" perspective cause you to think about your life today?

### ○ TUESDAY—MATTHEW 20

**Consider.** "The first will be last, and the last will be first," a favorite saying of Jesus (18:4, 18:30, 20:16, & 20:26.) It's a statement of God's remarkable grace: Jesus, the undeserving, received what we deserve—the wages of our sin. In turn, we receive what He alone deserves—the blessings and inheritance of the Father. Jesus' followers are "first" in the Kingdom because He has chosen to be "last." Indeed, amazing grace.

#### **Read.**

- In v.8, the landowner demonstrates his lavish generosity. But some are resentful and miss what this man offers—his faithfulness towards them, and his unmerited goodness towards others. Makes one wonder who will return for work the next day. Would you?
- In v.23, Jesus reveals His hand: He lives in submission to the will and authority of His Father. And in v.28, He will do so even to the point of death. To what extent are you in submission to your Heavenly Father?

**Reflect.** In v.28, Matthew uses the word "ransom" for the first and only time. We understand "ransom" as the price paid for the release of hostages. Do you recognize your salvation as being set free from a hurtful captor?

### ○ WEDNESDAY—MATTHEW 21

**Consider.** Another radical turning point in the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem. We can sense the tension building. Our story is moving towards a climax, and the most significant moments in the history of humankind.

#### **Read.**

- Another first for Matthew—the use of the title "king," quoting Zechariah in v.5. Although Jesus has been teaching about the "Kingdom," He now implies Who is King. What does this title infer regarding our relationship with Jesus?

- Is Jesus harsh and violent? In v.12, He overturns tables in the temple. In v.19, He curses a fig tree and it withers. Scholars suggest the two events demonstrate a single truth: fruitless religious rites will soon be eclipsed by a living relationship with God through His Savior. Does your faith show signs of stagnation? Do you need the freshness that Christ offers?

**Reflect.** Matthew has shown us the reactions to Jesus from numerous people. On the whole, the crowds are favorable. But their enthusiasm will soon fade when the cross comes into view. Does your eagerness for Christ come and go depending on your circumstances?

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### ○ THURSDAY—MATTHEW 22

**Consider.** Today's reading is an outright slug-fest with the Pharisees and Sadducees. However, rather than seeking a discussion with Jesus, they are attempting to trap, manipulate, and discredit. They've already made up their minds. Anyone you know? Yourself?

**Read.**

- The *Parable of the Wedding Feast* (vv.1-14) is perplexing. First, there is ambiguity: those who are invited vs. those who are chosen. Then it gets personal: removing guests not wearing wedding garments. Then it becomes severe: armies destroying cities, tying hand and foot and casting into outer darkness. One thing is certain – there is a serious and extreme nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. How do you personally make sense of Jesus' disturbing teachings?

**Reflect.** Notice the affect of Jesus' teaching on His hearers: the Pharisees are "amazed" (v.22); the crowds are "astonished" (v.33); and "no one could say a word in reply...no one dared to ask Him any more questions." (v.46). It's apparent that all who hears Jesus' words are provoked. How about you? What affect do Jesus' words have on your heart?

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### ○ FRIDAY—MATTHEW 23

**Consider.** Jesus' responses in the last chapter silence His opponents and send them packing. Today, Jesus addresses the crowd (v.1), and

describes His opponents as examples of *anti-disciples*—hypocrisy, duplicity, arrogance, and false religion. This is a forceful chapter, and illustrates how far from God people can be even when they think they know Him.

**Read.**

- Jesus' first of seven "woes" (v.13) indicts the Scribes and Pharisees for "*shut(ing) the Kingdom of Heaven in men's faces.*" While Jesus' mission is to open the Kingdom to all, the religious leaders are *limiting* entrance. How do you see our church "opening" or "shutting" the Kingdom to others?
- In "woes" #5, 6, & 7 (vv.25-32), Jesus criticizes those who offer an external appearance that masks the filth beneath the surface. People may be impressed with our *exterior* life, but God looks upon our *inner* life. In what areas of your life is your outward appearance different from your inward disposition?

**Reflect.** This chapter ends with a very emotional statement from Jesus: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...*" (vv.37-39). After all the criticism Jesus has received from His opponents, and after the harsh "woes" of the chapter, Jesus is not angry or resentful. His heart is broken for those who reject His message. In what ways might you break Jesus' heart? Does your heart break for those who are far from God?

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### ○ SATURDAY—MATTHEW 24

**Consider.** Matthew reveals something new today—*Jesus knows and tells of future events.* The disciples probe more deeply and Jesus launches into a two-chapter discourse—the longest since the Sermon on the Mount. His teaching is laden with fearful predictions, stern warnings, and a fateful end for those who reject.

**Read.**

- It would appear that the disciples are trying to impress Jesus with the magnificence of the Temple in Jerusalem (v.1). Jesus is unmoved. It is man-made and temporal. Are there accomplishments in your life that you presume impress God?
- Ever since Jesus' day, people have been calculating and predicting the date of His

return. Two things are clear. First, "*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*" (v. 36). And second, "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come*" (v.42). Timing is not the issue. Being *ready* is the issue. How can we assure we are?

**Reflect.** Consider God's heart in the context of vv.23:37 thru 24:2—grieving over His people, aware of the destruction they are bringing upon themselves. God knows what His people can be if they would follow His plan. How might God's people today be compromising His plan? How might you be compromising His plan for your life?

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**Notes:**



**New Horizon United Methodist Church**  
 3002 W. Bloomington Rd.  
 Champaign, IL 61822  
 217-359-8909  
[www.newhorizonchurch.org](http://www.newhorizonchurch.org)