

Love Letters

Reading Through the Gospels



Reading Guide
Week #5

Matthew 25
to Mark 2



NEW HORIZON
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Love Letters Reading Guide for Week #5 Matthew 25-Mark 2

A Week in Review. Jesus descends the Mount of Transfiguration for His final ascent into Jerusalem. The crowds welcome their King with a “Triumphal Entry,” but are perplexed as Jesus clears the temple, and pronounces woes upon the religious leaders.

This Week’s Reading. This week we’ll conclude our First Gospel. The final chapters in Matthew will lead us through Jesus’ trial, cross and Resurrection. The way is narrowing, and fewer and fewer follow. Jesus’ words become more cryptic and pointed, speaking of judgment, the end of the age, and eternal separation from God. In the end, He will be alone on the cross, forsaken even by the Father (v.27:46).

○ MONDAY—MATTHEW 25

Consider. Today, Jesus draws a deep line in the sand. When He returns at the end of the age, He will receive some and reject others. There is no middle ground, and no second chance. *The Ten Virgins*, emphasize preparation; *The Talents* emphasize laboring in the Kingdom; and *The Sheep and Goats* illustrate righteousness. All three are critical in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Read.

- With the *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, Jesus teaches of His soon and unannounced return at the end of the age. Disciples are to live in a state of readiness. How does the return of Christ strike you?
- With the *Parable of the Talents*, Jesus metaphorically teaches of God’s investments in our lives, and our investment in the lives of others. Who are those who have invested in you? Into whom are you investing?

Reflect. Prepare, labor and produce fruit—that’s the message of chapter 25. Notice also the tone of *love* throughout. Fulfilling God’s commands requires both *doing* and *loving*. Which of these two is the greater challenge for you?

○ TUESDAY—MATTHEW 26

Consider. Today’s chapter is among the longest in the New Testament. The plot against His life begins. Jesus will share the Last Supper with His disciples, then be betrayed, arrested, disowned, and spat upon. The way to the cross is fraught with tremendous emotional pain.

Read.

- In v.1, Jesus speaks of the Passover and His impending death. He seems to know the precise day of His death, yet doesn’t hesitate. How does Christ’s willingness to suffer for us strike you?
- Consider Jesus’ experience—rejected by those He came to save. What are times when you feel unappreciated and used? In those times, are you able to fellowship with the Savior Who knows your grief firsthand?

Reflect. In v.37, Jesus takes Peter, James and John into the Garden—the same men who were with Him at the Transfiguration. On the Mount, they were mesmerized; at Gethsemane, they fall asleep. Are you able to be equally faithful to Jesus in joy and in grief?

○ WEDNESDAY—MATTHEW 27

Consider. It’s morning, the day after Jesus’ arrest. Notice: Jesus’ entrance into the world brought upheaval—Herod and all Jerusalem are disturbed, the Magi flee, and infants are murdered (ch.2). Jesus’ final days are no different—the religious and political communities are in uproar, Judas’ hangs himself, and an insurrectionist is set free. It continues through Jesus’ Crucifixion—the earth quakes, rocks split, the temple veil is torn, and dead saints walk out of their graves. Something is afoot...

Read.

- v.25 is haunting: “*Let His blood be on us and on our children.*” The statement places the responsibility for Jesus’ death upon humankind, and speaks prophetically of what is ultimately true—Jesus’ *saving* blood is indeed upon all who believe. Are you able to see yourself as both responsible for Jesus’ death and a recipient of His grace?
- The crowds taunt Jesus in a way similar to the devil’s temptations in the wilderness (ch.4): “*Come down from the cross if you*

are the Son of God!" (v.39). Once more, Jesus is tempted to consider His own interests before God's. When are you tempted to place your interest before God's?

Reflect. At the cross, we see the dramatic chasm between those who reject and those who receive. The Sanhedrin, rioting crowds, governor, soldiers, and Judas and Peter renounce Jesus. Yet a handful of women, a lone Roman guard, and one timid Jewish leader side with Him. In standing with Jesus, we are among a significantly small minority. How does that make you feel as you follow Christ in today's world?

○ THURSDAY—MATTHEW 28

Consider. Today we conclude our First Gospel. Notice the similarities between the beginning and end: "An angel of the Lord" pronounces both Jesus' birth (1:20) and Resurrection (28:2). Jesus is called "Emmanuel—"God is *with us*" at His birth (1:23), and promises His disciples, "I am *with you always*" (28:20). Finally, those who witnessed His birth (His parents, the Magi) and witness His resurrection (the women and disciples) believe and rejoice. We have traveled full-circle with our Savior. We have seen and heard. Will we also receive and follow?

Read.

- Jesus' opponents stoop to a new low. They've opposed Jesus at every turn. At Jesus' trial they even violate their religious beliefs by trumping up charges. And today they resort to bribery to maintain their position. What drove them to cross those lines? When are you tempted to do the same?
- Notice the language of the Trinity in v.19. Throughout Matthew we have seen evidence of the cooperative work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How do you experience each member of the Trinity in your life?

Reflect. The disciples are not mere characters in Matthew's story. They are the central focus. Their calling, confusion, confession, and commission, is core to Christ's work—enlisting men and women in the Mission of God. Can you sense His call? Are you among them who do? Will you join them? Will you also be a passionate follower of Jesus?

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

The Book. Welcome to the Book of Mark, the second and shortest of the Four Gospels. Unlike Matthew's lengthy, detailed, ordered account, Mark's Gospel does not contain Christ's genealogy or birth narrative. Instead, we meet Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, being baptized by John the Baptist. Mark moves quickly (many stories we find in Matthew are not found in Mark), and ends abruptly (some versions of Mark end at the empty tomb, before Jesus appears to the women or His disciples). Yet, Mark devotes nearly 70% of his account to Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection.

The Writer. This Gospel is believed to have been written by John Mark, the Apostle Paul's missionary partner. Many scholars believe The Book of Mark is the earliest of the Four Gospels, dated near 70 AD, around the Fall of Jerusalem. Still others date Mark as 45 AD, 12 to 15 years after the Resurrection of Christ. Many scholars believe Matthew and Luke used Mark's writings as source material for their Gospels.

As You Read. Mark's brevity and fast pace do not make his Gospel second-rate. In fact, scholars find Mark to be a complex literary work, with innovative nuances that communicate the Gospel in unique and powerful ways. May God open our understanding and increase our love for our Savior as we explore the Gospel of Mark.

○ FRIDAY—MARK 1

Consider. In today's reading, Jesus is baptized, tempted by the devil, calls disciples, drives out demons, heals and prays. We just began our reading and already we are well into Jesus' ministry. Mark's jackrabbit start places his emphasis upon Jesus' message rather than Jesus' history and origin. Mark's approach causes us to read with anticipation...

Read.

- Mark is the first New Testament book to use the term "Gospel" (v.1). Gospel literally means "Good News." For Mark, this story is more than a historical record. It's a too-good-to-be-true message and a must-read for all. How you experienced the Gospel as "Good News?" Like Mark, are you compelled to share this Good News?

- We will see that Mark uses words that, in their original language, are forceful and harsh. In v.10, the heavens are "violently torn open" as the Father speaks to the Son. In v.12, the Spirit "casts/hurls" Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. In v.25, Jesus "raps demons on the knuckles" and "muzzles" them as He casts them out. In v.43, Jesus "snorts like a horse" as He gives warning. What does this aggressive language communicate about the nature of the Gospel?

Reflect. Historically speaking, Jesus' baptism by John was an embarrassment to the early church—following a Savior Who was baptized along with sinners. Are there aspects of following Jesus that you find humiliating?

○ SATURDAY—MARK 2

Consider. Mark wastes no time demonstrating that Jesus' life and teachings create waves of controversy. In v.5, He heals by forgiving. In v.15, He eats with tax collectors and sinners. In v.19, Jesus and His followers feast while religious folk fast. And in v.27, Jesus claims to be greater than the Sabbath laws He is violating. It begins—trouble mounts when the Savior arrives.

Read.

- A wonderful detail in Mark: In v.4, they "dig through" the roof to lower a paralyzed man to Jesus. This detail helps us to picture the mud and thatch roof of this historical period. Devotionally speaking, when have you had to "dig through" to reach Jesus?
- The literal rendering of v.23 is, the disciples "rubbed grain in their hands" as they separated the chaff from the grain. This kind of detail gives scholars reason to believe that Mark's stories are eyewitness accounts. How does it feel reading a story written by someone who was actually with Jesus?

Reflect. Jesus attracts the outcasts, "for there were many (sinners) who followed Him" (v.15). It's for this reason Jesus came: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (v.17). Are you able to humble yourself and take your place among those for whom Jesus came?
