

Bible Reading Blended Week 4

January 18: Genesis 42-43 and Matthew 13:33-58.

The famine hits not just Egypt, but all of the surrounding areas. Jacob finds out that there is grain in Egypt, so he sends his sons there. It is interesting to note that when famine hit earlier in Genesis, Abraham went to Egypt for a safe haven. The sons go with the exception of Benjamin. He was the last of Rachel's children and Israel did not want to part with him. The men arrive in Egypt, where they find themselves bowing down to their brother Joseph, just as his dreams had indicated. They do not recognize their brother, nor do they think that he can understand them. Since Joseph held such a high place within the Egyptian government, he was adorned with the common Egyptian dress. Joseph has also spent many years in Egypt, so he would be very familiar with the language and use it often. There was no google translate back then, so he would have had to adjust to the language, dress, and culture. He sends his brothers back with grain and all of their money, but holds Simeon back as collateral. They return and explain what has happened. Israel in a moment of self pity cries, "Everything happens to me!"

The brothers do not return to Egypt until their grain runs out. They know that they are coming under judgment because of what they had done to Joseph so many years ago. The crime they committed still haunts them and their fear is intense.

In our New Testament reading, we have more parables. Jesus gives them the parable that shows how precious the kingdom of God is. It is like a priceless pearl that a merchant sells everything he has just to purchase it. When we come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, the things of this world aren't as shiny and nice anymore. We don't have residence on earth. Instead, we belong in God's kingdom. As believers, we know that our salvation through Christ is more precious than anything this world has to offer.

There is an interesting problem Jesus runs into in Nazareth. The people from His hometown reject Him. They merely see Him as Joseph's kid, the son of a carpenter. They do not see Him as Messiah. We can run into similar problems with people that know us from our past. I was a completely different person before coming to faith. The folks that knew me prior to conversion would probably still look on my past to downplay my faith. Not to worry, God doesn't hold our past against us. We might, our friends might, and the enemy sure will, but God holds no record of wrong when we are washed with the blood of Jesus.

January 19: Genesis 44-45 and Matthew 14:1-21.

Joseph gives one more test to his brothers as they depart. He has the steward fill his brother's bags to the brim. He also has a cup, a cup that he labels as special, placed in Benjamin's sack. When the brothers leave, they are approached and asked how they could have done such evil. The men, not realizing that the cup was with them, agreed that if the cup is found then the guilty person will stay behind. The cup is found in Benjamin's bag. Judah throws himself at the mercy of Joseph, explaining that if Benjamin does not come back with him, then his father will die of grief.

This moves Joseph to order everyone else out of the room and identify himself as their brother. They are all terrified at his presence. The man that they had betrayed in such a way, selling him into slavery, now stands before them as one with authority! Of course they were terrified! Joseph, though, tells them not to worry. He sees that what they meant for evil, God had meant for good. Joseph encourages them to go home and get his father and their families and come back to Egypt to live.

In our reading in Matthew, we learn of John the Baptist's fate. John was imprisoned by Herod because John was speaking out about his illegal marriage to his brother Herodias's wife. Herod was one of those crazy rulers that believed he could do whatever he wanted. So he locked John up. Up to this point, John remained alive because the people regarded him as a prophet. Herod kept John alive to maintain political peace. However, after John's head is demanded, Herod has to give his head over to maintain political peace.

We also read about the feeding of 5,000. Jesus feeds a large crowd with just five loaves of bread and two fish. The loaves that the text describes would have been about the size of a Twinkie, not like what we get at the grocery store today. Still, with that, Jesus feeds all those people with very little.

January 20: Genesis 46-48 and Matthew 14:22-36

Jacob and his entire family go to Egypt. In total, there are 70 people that come to Egypt. Joseph explains that shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptian people. He directs them to tell Pharaoh they are shepherds so they will be sent to the land of Goshen. They do as they are instructed and settled down. Unfortunately, the famine still rages on. The money dries up, so the people offer their livestock to pay for their grain. Then the livestock is already owned by Pharaoh, so the people give their land for the grain. Pharaoh winds up owning all of the land before the famine lets up.

Jacob realizes that his time is coming to an end. He gives praise because he has not only been allowed to see Joseph one more time, but he has also been able to see his grandsons. Jacob goes to bless Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph realizes that Jacob is placing his right hand on Ephraim's head and tries to redirect his father. Manasseh should have been the one receiving the greater blessing since he was older. Jacob assures Joseph that Manasseh will be great, but Ephraim will be greater. Throughout the course of Genesis, we have seen the younger brother being greater than the older. This should not have surprised Joseph at all. God is going to do what He wants to do. Even though the blessing of the younger went against the worldly standards of the time, God is not bound to our norms and standards.

In Matthew, we read about Jesus walking across the water. The disciples are headed across the Lake of Galilee when they see a figure walking toward them in the middle of the night. They all become afraid because they think it is a ghost. Sailors see some weird stuff at sea, all the years I spent at sea, I never saw a person walk on the water. Peter asks that if it is Jesus that He would command him to walk out on the water to Jesus. Jesus grants the request and Peter makes his way toward Jesus. He sees the strength of the wind, though, and becomes afraid. He starts to sink and cries out to Jesus to save him. Peter's problem was that he took his eyes and focus off

of Jesus. Rather than focus on how big God is, he focused on how strong the wind was. When we are going through the storms of life it might not be pleasant, but we can weather the storm because we know our God is bigger than anything the world can throw at us.

I do not like to beat up Peter too much with this narrative. Out of all of the men, he is the only one that got out of the boat. Peter at least took the initial leap of faith and walked on the water. The rest of the disciples did not. As believers, let's step out on faith with God. If He is calling you to do something, even though it might seem terrifying, the best thing you can do is to step out and follow Him.

January 21: Genesis 49-50 and Matthew 15:1-20

Jacob knows that his time is coming to an end, so he gathers all of the patriarchs so that he can tell them what their futures hold. Reuben would have been the one chosen to lead since he was the oldest. However, since he slept with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (Gen 35:22), he will no longer lead. Simeon and Levi are angry men which drives them to kill. They will be dispersed. Judah is told that the scepter will not depart from Judah or the staff between his feet. The scepter and staff were symbols of royalty in Egypt. This is a prophetic vision of the Davidic covenant that will one day be established. David, who will come many generations after this pronouncement, is of the line of Judah. Even all the way back then, we see glimpses of God's ultimate plan of salvation.

Jacob passes away and his body is returned to rest with his fathers. They take him back to Mamre and bury him there. This is the same place that Sarah and Abraham were buried. Jacob also grows older and he passes away. Rather than take him back to rest with his fathers, he is embalmed in a coffin in Egypt. One day, that coffin will be carried into the promised land.

In the Matthew reading the Pharisees and the scribes are upset that the disciples are not washing their hands before they eat. We should wash our hands before we eat, so we might wonder why the Pharisees were so upset about it. The problem is that the disciples were not following the ritual cleansing practice. It was a long process that was less about cleansing and more about the "show". Jesus asks them why the Pharisees break the tradition by not following the Law. He then goes on to explain that it is not what goes into the person that makes him or her defiled, but what comes out of them. Sin is born in the heart. Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable - who can understand it?" As believers, we must guard our hearts and keep them clean.

January 22: Exodus 1-3 and Matthew 15:21-39.

Exodus starts with a quick recap of how the Israelites came to be established in Egypt. Joseph and his family were well loved by the Pharaoh. As time went by, though, a new Pharaoh came around that did not know Joseph. He looked at the Israelites as a threat. So he ordered the Egyptian midwives to kill any Jewish male babies. Jewish boys continue to be born and when the midwives are asked about it, they simply respond that the Jewish women are tough and have already delivered the baby by the time the midwives arrived to help.

Moses, a son born to a Levite man and a Levite woman, is placed by his mother in a papyrus basket in the Nile river. The baby floats down to the place where Pharaoh's daughter is bathing. She feels bad for the boy and adopts him. Moses spend the first few years of his life being raised by his mother. Moses grows to be a man and witnesses the oppression of his people. He kills an Egyptian that is treating an Israelite cruelly. He thought no one had noticed it, but when he approaches two Israelites arguing they ask him if he will kill them the way he killed the Egyptian. So Moses flees to Midian.

One day Moses is out shepherding his father in law's flocks when he sees a burning bush. There is fire, but the bush is not consumed. Moses investigates. He is directed to take off his sandals because he is standing on holy ground. From there, The LORD directs Moses to go back to Egypt to free His people.

In the New Testament reading we discover the faith of a Gentile mother. Jesus heals her daughter, showing that He has not just come to bless the Israelites, but all people. Jesus continues moving around the Sea of Galilee healing many people. A crowd follows Him for three days and He has compassion on them. He tells the disciples to feed this crowd of 4,000. Jesus once again shows that He provides.

January 23: Exodus 4-6 and Matthew 16

Moses pushes back asking why Pharaoh would believe him and his message. God proclaims that he will give Moses signs and wonders for Pharaoh and then demonstrates a small sample of what He can do. Moses continues to complain, stating that he is not an eloquent man. It is believed that Moses probably had a stuttering problem. Nevertheless, God is going to use Moses to free the people.

On his way back to Egypt, we read about Moses's son being circumcised by his mother. This might seem like it is out of left field, but it shows Moses's mentality versus his wife Zipporah's. Moses would have been accustomed to the rituals of the Egyptians. They circumcised their males at the age of 14. Zipporah, having grown up in a Hebrew home, knew that they were currently out of God's covenant because they had not yet had their son circumcised. This shows how seriously Zipporah is taking this mission!

Moses meets with Pharaoh and he is less than pleased. He does not free the people. Instead, he makes their lives even more difficult, not providing them straw for the bricks. Even though they make production more difficult, the Israelites are expected to meet their current output.

In the New Testament reading, the disciples are confused. Jesus tells them to beware the yeast of the Pharisees. The men thought that He meant literal bread. Jesus was speaking about their inflammatory words that go against God's word and His kingdom. Peter makes the first proclamation of Jesus Christ as Messiah.

January 24: Exodus 7-8 and Mathew 17

Moses and Aaron stand before Pharaoh. Pharaoh demands a sign. Moses, as The LORD commanded him, throws his staff down and it becomes a snake. Pharaoh's magicians and sorcerers are able to do the same with their staffs. The serpent from Moses' staff eats the other serpents. Pharaoh's heart is hardened, though. He will not budge. So the Egyptian water is turned to blood. Everything in the Nile died as a result of this first plague. Pharaoh's heart remained hardened because his magicians could also turn water to blood through their occult practices.

Frogs came upon the Egyptian land and plagued the people. Pharaoh tells Moses to ask God to remove the frogs. Moses agrees, but only if Pharaoh lets the people go. The next day, Moses is true to his word and God removes the frogs. Unfortunately, since there was relief, Pharaoh no longer feels the need to uphold his end of the bargain and changes his mind. They will NOT be freed.

From there, gnats plague the people, followed by swarms of flies. The land of Goshen, where the Israelites live, is spared the plague. Yet Pharaoh's heart remains hardened. He would not let the people go. This is not the first time that Egypt suffered plagues because of the Israelites. We would think that Pharaoh would have learned from history or he would see that Goshen is spared from some plagues to make his decision. He does not, though. Pharaoh's heart remains hardened. The message does not penetrate. Things will only get worse for him as time goes on.

In Matthew, Jesus goes to a mountain with Peter, James, and John. When He is there with them, He is transformed in front of them. His face shines like the sun and His clothes become white as the light. Moses and Elijah appeared to Him and they were talking. Seeing this, Peter runs to Jesus to say that he will build a tent for all three of them. Again, a voice from heaven proclaims "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him. Listen to Him!"

January 25: Exodus 9-10 and Matthew 18:1-20

Pharaoh still just does not get it. Well, he gets it, but his heart remains hardened. The Egyptians suffer through a few more plagues. There is the mass death of their livestock. This is followed by boils that infect all of the Egyptians, including the sorcerers and magicians. Then large hail comes. The people are warned to seek shelter for themselves and their animals that are outside or they will die. Some took heed of the advice, others did not. Crops were destroyed and what was left were soon devastated by the plague of locusts. Never before had there been such a large number of locusts, and there never will be again (Ex10:14). After the locusts darkness falls over all of Egypt, except where the Israelites live.

Throughout these chapters we see Pharaoh struggle with everything that is going on. Several times he relents and decides to let them go. Sometimes he agrees to just let a few go. He agrees to let everyone go, but the flocks have to remain behind. Moses insists that all of the livestock needed to come with them since they did not know what God would require them to sacrifice when they were freed.

To a degree, Pharaoh reminds me of someone who knows the truth, but they do not want to accept the truth because they are afraid of what they are giving up. In Pharaoh's case, he is

giving up the people. In the case of folks today, it is a matter of not wanting to give up sin. There are some that know who Jesus is, but they do not want to make Jesus lord of their lives because they do not want to give up their sin. Sin can harden hearts.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus is asked who is the greatest. Jesus shocks them all by pointing to the children and saying that they are the greatest. His point is that if people want to be great in the Kingdom of God, they must give up their understanding and trust in the Lord. As believers, we have to trust Him first and foremost. Jesus also gives a great example of how to properly enforce church discipline. If someone has a problem with a person, they should go directly to the person in private. If that does not work, then take a couple of witnesses to have the chat. If that still does not work, then get the whole church involved. Nowhere in there does it say to go and gossip about the person!