WEEK 9
Nov. 9 - 15, 2026

Daily Bible readings

Matthew 1:1 - 13:52

Jesus: God's work through his people continues

Monday, Nov. 9

Matthew 1:1 – 2:23

Many of you have seen the television series, The Chosen, either on your own or watching as a group at church. For those who have seen it, I'd like to raise a couple of points from the show that will be beneficial as you read Matthew—and one caution.

Two things the TV show does that viewers either love or hate are emphasizing the Jewishness of the life and times of Jesus, and bringing in to sharp focus the individual humanity of each of the disciples. While both of those involve dramatization that goes beyond the words of scripture, I think they are positive, and both will help in understanding Matthew.

The very beginning of Matthew makes it clear that this is a continuation of the story of the Jewish people, "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:". Matthew isn't starting a new story; he's starting a new chapter of a very old story.

Matthew and Luke both relate accounts of the birth of Jesus. Here in Matthew, it is a fairly brief telling which is preceded by a list of ancestors. It is longer in Luke, and that account tells more of the supernatural events surrounding the birth. (Mark begins his gospel with Jesus as an adult being baptized by John, and John begins his gospel long before the birth, with the role Jesus played in the creation of the world.)

This brings me to one of the positive things about The Chosen.

It's easy in reading the Bible for the disciples and gospel writers to kind of blur together, but the TV show reminds us they are very different people with very different perspectives and backgrounds. As you read the gospel of Matthew and later the other gospels, pay attention to how each has distinct emphases even while telling of the same life. God gave us not one, but four, accounts of the life of Jesus. Chances are that you will not find them equally compelling, and that's OK—they were written by different people and written FOR different people. It's OK to have a favorite, and it doesn't have to be the same one as someone else's—one really was written more for people like you, whatever that looks like.

The other positive from The Chosen that you'll see reflected in Matthew is the emphasis on Jesus being part of the Jewish people and faith. From chapter 1 forward he is placed in the context of the Old Testament story and his continuity with it is a recurring theme.

Daily reflections by Rev. Mark Fleming

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If you have just read Genesis and Exodus with us, the earliest names in the genealogy are familiar to you (others will be before long). Their story is also Jesus's story.

While Matthew only devotes eight verses to the birth of Jesus, he spends a lot more time on the visit of the magi and the following escape to Egypt. You can't read the story of Joseph protecting his family by moving them to Egypt without thinking back to the earlier Joseph who did the same thing.

Matthew quotes prophecy suggesting the Messiah would come out of Egypt, and that he be connected to Nazareth. Both of these were unlikely places to be home to the Jewish Messiah, but for Matthew, that very unlikeliness provided further confirmation.

Look for Old Testament parallels throughout Matthew and the other gospels. The people who first followed Jesus would have recognized them, and those parallels helped them believe. We look at it from the other direction, and probably know much more about Jesus than we know of the Old Testament stories…but we can also look at the parallels to help us understand both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

And the caution I mentioned: The Matthew of The Chosen is a much-loved character with a lot of quirks, and a particular reason to be interested in his Jewish heritage. Try not to inject too much of the fictional "'Chosen' Matthew" into your reading of the gospel.

Monday meditation
Proverbs 10:15-16

The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but poverty is the ruin of the poor.

The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death.

Prayer focus

God, let me see you wherever you show yourself, not just where I expect you to be.

The in-between times
Tuesday, Nov. 10
Matthew 3:1 – 4:25

Matthew covers a lot quickly in chapters 2 and 3, skipping directly from the days of Jesus as a young child returned from Egypt with his family to his baptism by John.

After the baptism, the story takes a surprising turn. "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

We might have expected his baptism to be the end of any question about who Jesus was and what he could accomplish. Instead, it ushers in a 40-day journey of intense testing.

The number 40 should already be familiar to you from the flood (when it rained for 40 days and 40 nights) and the 40 years the Hebrew people spent wandering in the wilderness.

Each of those has several things in common with the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness.

- They were "in-between" times. In each case, the time before and the time after were very different—and the time in between was not like either. Sometimes, change requires giving up what was before receiving—or even knowing—what is to come.
- They were times of intense communion with God.
- They were times of testing and temptation. For Noah, his real test came at end, and for the Hebrews much of the testing was early in the journey. With Jesus, we don't know how most of his time was spent during those 40 days, but we can imagine it was spent in prayer and meditation, gaining the strength for the temptation to come.

Unlike Noah and Moses, Jesus passed his test and resisted his temptation.

It is easy, though, to underestimate what an accomplishment that was. Often Christians, out of a sense of misplaced reverence, assume that Jesus wasn't really tempted; that he was just going through the motions for our benefit.

Rather than showing respect for Jesus, that attitude trivializes his sacrifice. We read in Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."

If Jesus wasn't really tempted, his righteousness is artificial, and his claim to be one of us is a lie.

In his temptations, Satan strikes at the deepest desires of human beings: the need for our hunger to be satisfied, the need to feel safe, and the need to be in control. Each time, though, Jesus chooses to be faithful to his calling. Each time he resists sin, he becomes stronger.

Tuesday meditation
Proverbs 10:17

Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.

Prayer focus

Lord, grant me the strength and discipline to resist temptation, however attractive it is.

Not abolish, but fulfill
Wednesday, Nov. 11
Matthew 5:1 – 6:24

You could easily find hundreds of sermons based on today's reading (much of which is a sermon itself) without finding two that have the same exact focus—and each could be meaningful.

This is a rich body of teaching that covers significant areas of life. If taken seriously, it defines those areas of life in ways that challenge how the world views them.

To help organize your thoughts as you read it, and, I hope, re-read it many times, this section can be broken down into parts.

First it has the passages we call the beatitudes.

I remember seeing a book my mother had called the "Be Happy Attitudes." I never read the book, which was written by Robert Schuller, but the title was a play on words using the beatitudes as a guide to happiness. I don't know if the book was any good or not, but the title stuck with me as a clever reminder of how the beatitudes show that happiness can be built on unlikely foundations like mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst, persecution and a poor spirit.

But they are more than a guide to positive thinking. The beatitudes show us that the values of the kingdom of God look different from the values of our everyday world. They show us that happiness has its roots not in abundance, but in need. It is those who see the poverty of their spirit that find the kingdom of God, those who acknowledge their grief who find comfort, those who humbly recognize their weakness who find strength, those who know they lack righteousness who attain it, those who forgive who will be forgiven, those who seek to make peace who find peace, those who are rejected by the world who will be embraced by God. Our satisfaction grows from our dissatisfaction and the seeking it prompts.

It also has several passages about righteousness going beyond action and into mindset. The command to not murder doesn't just refer to the act of killing someone…it starts when we devalue them. Similarly, lust isn't just dangerous for the acts it can lead to, but for the attitudes it creates. The righteousness Jesus calls us to isn't just good behavior, it is thorough love.

In 5:13-16 and in the verses starting in chapter 6, we read a lot of practical admonitions for holy living, which continue with tomorrow's reading.

Along the same theme, but worth noting separately, is the introduction to how to pray, when Jesus shares what we call the Lord's Prayer.

It provides five points to include in our prayers—points that we often forget in our rush to ask God for the things we want.

- Start by acknowledging that God is God. This is where the 10 Commandments start. This is where holy living begins.

- Pray for God's will to be done. This is a reminder that prayer is to find out what God wants from us, not to tell him what we want from him.
- Pray that God will meet today's needs. Remember the lesson of the manna—trusting God is a one-day-at-a-time proposition.
- Remember that the grace we show to others will become the grace God shows to us.
- Pray for freedom from temptation, and deliverance from the evils that come our way.

Matthew continues to assure us that Jesus, as different as he may sound from what the people expected, is a continuation of God's revelation to the Jewish people: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Wednesday meditation
Proverbs 10:18-19

Whoever conceals hatred with lying lips and spreads slander is a fool.

Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.

Prayer focus

Re-shape my mind and heart to be worthy of your kingdom.

Seeking and finding
Thursday, Nov. 12
Matthew 6:25 – 7:28

Chapters 6 and 7 are a series of teachings that can appear random but are unified in their practicality.

In chapter 5, Jesus shared the beatitudes. While beautiful and powerful, the beatitudes can look like such lofty goals that we're not quite sure how to apply them. He then brings the challenge to live into righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law—a noble goal, but one we might not know how to even start working on.

His teaching started with lofty theories, continued into ambitious goals, and now shifts to practical advice on how to bring those theories and goals into life. Step back a little as you read now, and turn from trying to find great ideas and instead look for earthy advice on putting those ideas into action.

How do we put God's kingdom first? We stop worrying about things that aren't as important as we think they are, and aren't in our control as much as we think they are. And how do we stop worrying? By putting God's kingdom first.

That sounds like a circular argument, but it's really just prioritization. Decide what's important and start there. And the world we'll only be part of for a few unpredictable years ultimately isn't as important as the world we'll inhabit for eternity. Use your time on earth to enter into the eternal life to come.

There was the caution in the Lord's Prayer that the way we forgive will shape how we are forgiven. How do we get forgiveness? Focus more on our own shortcomings that are right in front of us rather than taking a microscope to find our neighbors' failings.

How do we get God to give us what we need? Ask.

How do we know who to trust? Look at what kind of fruit they produce.

We know it won't always be easy, and we've already seen in the beatitudes that the path we're following isn't the wide and busy path—it leads to destruction.

Verses 7:13-14 tell us that few find the narrow path that leads to life: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Notice the verses that come right before and after.

In 7:7-12 we're told that if we want to find, we need to seek. Few find the way to life, not because it is so well hidden, but because it is so seldom sought out.

Then 7:15-23 speaks about a tree and its fruit. If we want to know who's telling us the truth, look at what they really produce.

Don't be distracted by the blazing color of dying leaves or the shiny tinsel hanging on a cut tree, but look at real results.

And if that doesn't drive the point home well enough, Jesus follows with the story of the wise and foolish builders. Who has a life that withstands the inevitable storms and crises that come? What kind of faith do they have? How did they get to that point?

Jesus presents us with challenges that look impossible at first glance, but he also gives us practical advice on meeting those challenges. Both the vision and the instructions are important.

Thursday meditation
Proverbs 10:20-21

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.

The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense.

Prayer focus

Pray for the wisdom to discern both the righteous and the fools, to follow the path of the wise and heed the warning of the foolish.

Meaning in miracles
Friday, Nov. 13
Matthew 8:1 – 9:38

Most of this section is healing stories—times when Jesus supernaturally rids people of diseases and disabilities with miracles that are testimony to his power.

For most of Christian history, these stories have attracted people to faith in Jesus. But with the enlightenment thinking of the 17th and 18th centuries and modernist thought of the 19th and 20th centuries, they became an embarrassment to many Christian teachers and thinkers. We had an era in which the wisdom of Christian teaching and the work of Christian people was to bring the salvation of the world. Miracles reeked of superstition. For some, even the miracle of resurrection was too much of a stretch.

Christianity, though, is grounded in the life, death and resurrection of one man, who was fully man but also was God himself. He shared our limitations and also shared God's power. Sometimes we can get a glimpse of understanding all that is meant by that; other times we just have to give thanks for it.

Jesus never presented himself as a magical healer of all the ills of the world. He lived in a world where he was surrounded by the sick and dying, yet we read of only a few miraculous healings.

The miracles served a purpose.

In the early verses of chapter 9, Jesus tells a paralytic that his sins are forgiven. When accused of blasphemy, he responds by saying, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home."

The man did take up his mat and go home…and the crowd praised God.

In case anyone was thinking that following Jesus was a "Get Out of Jail Free" card, Jesus made it clear that following him comes with a cost. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Miracles had a purpose then, and they have a purpose now. We don't know how or why God sometimes chooses to intervene in ways we call miracles. We know that sometimes he does. Most of the time he doesn't.

For most of us, the things we hope for, and even pray for, will come to us once we are freed from the limitations of life on earth. When miracles happen, thank God for them but don't stop there—look for the purpose behind the miracle. God is accomplishing something through it beyond what we first see.

Friday meditation
Proverbs 10:22-23

The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.

A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.

Prayer focus

God, show us your power that we might see both miracles and meaning.

Patience first, then peace
Saturday, Nov. 14
Matthew 10:1 – 12:21

Have you ever wished you could do magic?

I'm not talking about the sleight-of-hand of a stage magician or card tricks at a party, but real magic, changing the rules of matter and energy to make things you want happen.

It's a common wish.

Think of all the superhero stories that Hollywood churns out. They might not use the word, but they are stories of magic. Most of the superheroes have some magical abilities that let them do what mere mortals can't. It's never unlimited, so the stories are about how they get around whatever limitations they have in order to use their magic.

Even things we don't think of as magical we often treat as magical. We might dismiss a fairy tale where the princess uses a love potion to attract her true love—but how much do we spend on cosmetics and even medications we are convinced will make us more attractive and more worthy of love?

How many people are convinced that if their candidate is elected they will suddenly have a better job and more money and crime will go away and all will be well with the world?

Sure, cosmetics and medications and elected leaders all have things they can accomplish—but the reality seldom lives up to the expectation.

In chapter 10 we read of something that sounds wonderful and magical. The 12 disciples are sent out into the world by Jesus, equipped with the ability to do great things: "to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness."

Why, then, do the chapters that follow take a dark turn?

In 12:34, Jesus says, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Those are unexpected words from the Prince of Peace.

In 12:15-21, Matthew writes, "Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.'"

Superman might be able to redirect the comet that an evil genius has put on a collision course with earth, but he can't remove evil from the heart.

A loved one might be healed today, but we still occupy fragile bodies that have only a limited time on earth.

An evil spirit might be cast out, but it has lots of allies still at work.

Jesus came to bring peace, but scripture makes it clear that sin and evil and violence and death won't give up their grip on the world easily.

Freedom from captivity, whether you're a slave in Egypt or overwhelmed by the challenges of life today, is promised. Hold on to that hope, even when it takes longer that you would like it to. Don't mistake fleeting pain for permanent defeat.

Saturday meditation
Proverbs 10:24-25

What the wicked dread will overtake them; what the righteous desire will be granted.

When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.

Prayer focus

We pray for peace, but often lack the patience it requires. Let us trust your timing, Lord.

God doesn't always lead where we want to follow

Sunday, Nov. 15
Matthew 12:22 – 13:52

Jesus continues teachings that make it clear the kingdom of God is about more than just a little bit of sprucing up. Repentance requires reversal, not a minor course correction.

After the miracles of Jesus become known, more people want to see those signs.

Just like us, people in the day of Jesus craved spectacle. They wanted to be amazed.

In 12:38, some Pharisees and teachers challenge Jesus to perform a miracle.

He responds with, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

We haven't yet gotten to Jonah in our Bible readings, but it's a familiar story. God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh to proclaim God's word. But Jonah doesn't like the people of Nineveh and doesn't really want them to have the opportunity to repent, so he heads off in the other direction. After a storm and a shipwreck, Jonah ends up being swallowed by a giant fish and spit out in, of all places, Nineveh.

When I was younger, I always wondered why Jesus referred to Jonah here. His story is kind of complicated. Why not talk about the sign of the sea being parted, or the world being flooded, or the people being freed from Egypt?

Jonah's story, though, specifically gets to the challenge Jesus is presenting to the religious leaders of his day. God wants his message spread to the whole world—even the parts of the world his people don't like very much.

If the Pharisees and the teachers of the law won't spread God's word, God has a history of getting pretty creative in making sure it gets spread one way or another. If a fish can accomplish his purpose, so can a rogue preacher and his motley band of disciples.

God wants the kind of all-in repentance that happened in Nineveh once the people were able to hear God's truth. He'll find a way to make that happen.

Sunday meditation
Proverbs 10:26

As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him.

Prayer focus

Lead me where you will, and let me follow without hesitation.