



KINGDOM PURSUIT

Part One

Forty Daily Devotions
from the Book of Matthew
(Based on the NKJV)

Introduction

There are many things that I admire about Matthew. One of the most admired things about him is that he was committed to introducing people to Jesus before he was ever called to be an apostle. Luke's Gospel records that Matthew (Levi) gave a banquet for Jesus in his home after his conversion for the purpose of introducing Jesus to his friends, family, and associates. This special, evangelistic event was held prior to his being asked to become one of the 12 apostles. There is a good lesson here for all of us. We see that Christ selected His apostles from those who were already serving Him. They did not become apostles and then begin to serve the Lord! We have learned that the best way to get something done is to give it to a busy person! Matthew was a man already busy spreading the gospel and that made him a likely candidate for expanded opportunities.

Daily Reading Schedule

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
1	Matthew 1:1-17	09/10/23
2	Matthew 1:18-25	09/11/23
3	Matthew 2:1-12	09/12/23
4	Matthew 2:13-23	09/13/23
5	Matthew 3:1-17	09/14/23
6	Matthew 4:1-11	09/15/23
7	Matthew 4:12- 25	09/16/23
8	Matthew 5:1-16	09/17/23
9	Matthew 5:17-30	09/18/23
10	Matthew 5:31-48	09/19/23
11	Matthew 6:1-15	09/20/23
12	Matthew 6:16-34	09/21/23
13	Matthew 7:1-14	09/22/23
14	Matthew 7:15-29	09/23/23
15	Matthew 8:1-13	09/24/23
16	Matthew 8:14-27	09/25/23
17	Matthew 8:28 - 9:8	09/26/23
18	Matthew 9:9-17	09/27/23
19	Matthew 9:18-34	09/28/23
20	Matthew 9:35 - 10:1	09/29/23

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
21	Matthew 10:2-15	09/30/23
22	Matthew 10:16-27	10/01/23
23	Matthew 10:28-42	10/02/23
24	Matthew 11:1-11	10/03/23
25	Matthew 11:12-24	10/04/23
26	Matthew 11:25 - 12:8	10/05/23
27	Matthew 12:9-21	10/06/23
28	Matthew 12:22-32	10/07/23
29	Matthew 12:33-45	10/08/23
30	Matthew 12:46 - 13:8	10/09/23
31	Matthew 13:9-23	10/10/23
32	Matthew 13:24-33	10/11/23
33	Matthew 13:34-46	10/12/23
34	Matthew 13:47-58	10/13/23
35	Matthew 14:1-13	10/14/23
36	Matthew 14:14-27	10/15/23
37	Matthew 14:28 - 15:3	10/16/23
38	Matthew 15:4-20	10/17/23
39	Matthew 15:21-31	10/18/23
40	Matthew 15:32 - 16:4	10/19/23

Day 1: Matthew 1:1-17

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham...and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah.” (Matthew 1:1 &6)

Since Matthew’s paramount and consuming desire was to reach his fellow Jewish people with the gospel, he began his record of the events of the life of Christ with a genealogy that emphasized Jesus’ Davidic lineage. Although genealogies may not make for exciting reading, there is much to be learned from them! I want us to consider two very important things about Matthew’s genealogy. First, let’s note what was *included* in this lineage. Although Matthew was writing to convince his Jewish audience of Christ’s claim to being the promised Messiah, he did not limit his reach to the Jewish people alone. His record of Jesus’ family tree included the names of many prominent Jews, but it also included the names of several Gentiles. This record became even more universal in the sense that it included women – a custom not readily accepted at that time. It is clear to see that Matthew was convinced Jesus was the Savior of the entire world and not just a chosen few! Second, we also must consider what was *excluded* in this lineage. Rahab was not labeled “the harlot” and Ruth was not designated as “the Moabitess.” David was listed as “David the King” and not “David the adulterer.” Also excluded were the sordid details of David’s heart-breaking affair with Bathsheba. While we live in a world that chooses to focus on our faults and flaws, we serve a God who chooses to focus on our value and worth!

Prayer Emphasis: Spend some time in prayer today **asking** God to show you how He sees you. **Remember** that He sees us through the filter of the cleansing blood of His Son and has, therefore, declared us to be “saints.” Let’s do our very best to **think** and **act** like saints today.

Day 2: Matthew 1:18 - 25

“So all of this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’” (Matthew 1:22-23)

One of the things I love most about Christmas is that it provides us with an opportunity to reflect on Christ – who He is and why He came. In a dream, Joseph was directed to name Mary’s newborn baby Jesus and was told, “He will save His people from their sins” (1:21). Then Matthew included a quote from the Old Testament that is not found in any of the other gospels. He includes the words of Isaiah 7:14 regarding the virgin bearing a child and calling His name Immanuel which means “God with us.” Jesus can save because He is the God of John 3:16. In Him are found all of the Bible’s promises of salvation to those who will believe on His name. It is also important to note that Matthew mentioned the fact that the birth and naming of Christ all came about as it had been “spoken by the Lord” so that God’s Word “might be fulfilled.” Everything about Christ – His birth and His life – was to “fulfill” the Old Testament Scriptures. Make a note of the different times you see the words “fulfill” or “fulfilled” as you read through this first book of the New Testament. In most translations, you should find it 16 or 17 times. That is more times than you will find those words in any other gospel or book in the New Testament. Matthew’s purpose for repeatedly using this word was so he could convince his Jewish readers that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of whom the Old Testament had so clearly spoken.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to help you to be fully convinced of who Christ really is and why He came to earth as a man. When we are truly convinced, we will live lives that are more convincing to others! **Commit** now to be faithful in your Bible reading time and in your personal walk with Christ.

Day 3: Matthew 2:1-12

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” (Matthew 2:1-3)

When King Herod heard the visiting Magi (Wise Men) mention they had come to “worship” one that had been born “King of the Jews,” he was “troubled” and took immediate action to find and destroy the Christ child. Herod “gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together” and “he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born” (3:4). His purpose for this meeting was to help him discover the location of this *born* king in order that he might accomplish his evil purposes and have the child killed. Herod was not *born* a king. He was *appointed* as king by the Roman Empire and any such *born* king was an immediate threat to his position and power. We would be wise to realize that anyone who seeks to find and fulfill God’s will for his or her life will meet with great opposition from Satan, God’s enemy. But, as God was with Joseph, He will be with us! He will carefully guide us through every step of the way as we follow His divine plan for our lives! It is worth noting that the *actions* and *distractions* of the enemy did not keep these wise men from their intended purpose. They had come to worship Him, and that is exactly what they did! Notice that their worship included sacrificial giving – not only of their treasures but also of their time and efforts.

Prayer Emphasis: Seek God’s power and protection as we journey together in our **Kingdom Pursuit**. **Pray** for at least five other people in the church today and then **let them know** that you have prayed for them.

Day 4: Matthew 2:13-23

“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’” (Matthew 2:13)

Today, we are made aware of the fact that we have an enemy to overcome if we are to be successful in our **Kingdom Pursuit**. We will also see that our enemy is quick to anger and slow to be discouraged. Herod’s response to not being able to readily identify and kill the Christ child resulted in a brutal and bloody assault against all the children aged two and under. The age range of the infants that Herod ordered to be killed helps us see that approximately two years had passed since the actual birth of Christ. The word “fulfilled” (vs. 2:17 and 23) is found twice more in our reading today. We can be assured that the God who so clearly prophesied of Christ’s coming was aware of the opposition that was to come against Him. He is also aware of those who oppose our **Kingdom Pursuit** and will aid us to successfully find our way just as He guided Joseph. It is important for us to be aware that we have many friends to guide us on our journey and aid us in the defeat of the enemy. One such friend will be introduced to us in the early verses of chapter three. John the Baptist came “in those days” (3:1) – the days that he was most needed – and preached messages to remind his listeners that the Kingdom of Heaven was near. His reference to the kingdom here was to a Person and not to just a place.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to help us see the *Person* that we are pursuing and **encourage someone else** you know to journey with us at this time. **Ask Him** to show you who He would have you to encourage today.

Day 5: Matthew 3:1-17

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3:16-17)

We begin our thoughts with the words found near the end of our reading today. God spoke from heaven to announce that Jesus was a “beloved Son” in whom He (God) was “well pleased.” This remark by God indicates more than the fact that some minimum standard had been met. It was a statement that indicated that the Son (Jesus) had brought full pleasure to the Father by doing the will of the Father. John the Baptist also pleased God. He pleased God with his faithfulness to preach even as many observers stood by to thwart his every effort to announce the pending ministry of the Messiah. Jesus pleased God with His willingness to obediently humble Himself in the matter of water baptism. Baptism by immersion is indicated here by the term “Jesus came up immediately from the water.” Note that God’s encouraging voice immediately followed the willing obedience that Jesus so humbly exhibited. Just a hint – you should be able to locate the word “fulfill” at least once more in today’s Scripture reading!

Prayer Emphasis: Spend some time today **thinking** about how pleased God is with your personal walk with Him and your determination to succeed in this **Kingdom Pursuit**. Find some time to **get alone** with God today and **ask** Him for some much-needed advice. **Realize** that God desires that we all be children in whom He is “well pleased.”

Day 6: Matthew 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’” (Matthew 4:1-3)

It is difficult to accept the idea that one could be “led...by the Spirit” and yet at the same time “be tempted by the devil.” However, we are told this is exactly what happened to Jesus! Notice that Satan tempted Jesus three times to commit acts of selfish indulgence by appealing to fleshly needs, pride, and vanity. With enticements that ranged from the most basic physical needs (bread) to unimaginable luxuries (the kingdoms of the world), the enemy sought to use pride and greed to defeat the Son of God. After all, these same temptations had sufficed Satan well in the Garden of Eden when he enticed mankind to sin. However, Jesus was no ordinary man with ordinary desires and ambitions! He was the very Son of God in flesh and, as such, He successfully maneuvered His way through the temptations Satan threw at Him by keeping His mind focused on the Word of God. With each temptation, Jesus responded with the words, “It is written!” But it was more than just a limited knowledge of what was “written” that defeated the enemy that day. Each time Jesus responded to one of Satan’s temptations, He did so by quoting from the commands of God found in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Prayer Emphasis: If our Lord used God’s Word to respond to the enemies’ temptations, then how can we imagine succeeding in our **Kingdom Pursuit** using our own strength and wisdom? Today would be a good time to **review** the words that Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13 in His responses to Satan’s temptations. It might also be a good time to **thank God** for His Word and what it means to us. **Renew your commitment** to reading and obeying God’s commands.

Day 7: Matthew 4:12-25

“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him.” (Matthew 4:18-20)

As Jesus walked along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers “casting a net into the sea.” He used that opportunity to reach out to these men with the promise to change their life work to that of fishing for men. But before fishing could ever begin, there would have to first be a season of *following*. This proved to be a less than difficult task for Peter and Andrew because we are told “they immediately left their nets and followed” Jesus. But they left more than just their nets. The same can be said of James and John, about whom we will read tomorrow. Those two brothers were preparing (mending) their nets when Jesus called them, but their response to that call found them leaving their nets, their ship, and their father in order to follow Jesus. Too often we give God only the minimum requirement asked and nothing more. These four men would have none of that. They gave the Lord what He asked plus more. Their commitment was not limited to the minimum requirement. Soon they were following Jesus throughout Galilee and assisting Him in His preaching, teaching, and healing of the multitudes. Along with the multitudes, they followed Him up a mountain and listened to Jesus’ first recorded sermon. We should learn from this story that our **Kingdom Pursuit** is more about what lies ahead than what we leave behind. By the way, you should be able to find the word “fulfilled” once more in today’s verses.

Prayer Emphasis: Consider what your own **Kingdom Pursuit** has cost you and then **compare** it to all that you have received along the way. **Thank God** for all He has done to bring you to where you are today. **Thank Him** especially for your salvation and **pray** for the salvation of someone you know today.

Day 8: Matthew 5:1-16

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them...” (Matthew 5:1-2)

I think it is important to note that Jesus taught “His disciples” that “came to Him.” Surely we must agree that there must be some initiative on our part if we are going to become fully committed followers of Jesus Christ! What Jesus “taught them,” that day was His first recorded sermon, and it is now most commonly referred to as The Sermon on the Mount. We can see that this sermon included nine promised “blessings” on certain followers who served in various ways and under certain circumstances. It is worth noting that the number nine is a number closely associated with judgment in both the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps there is an indication here that these qualities mentioned by Jesus in His first sermon should be important to us since we will someday stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. From the beginning, Jesus made it clear that the **Kingdom Pursuit** is not one marked by pleasure and worldly prosperity. He spoke of being “poor in spirit” (v. 3), mourning, hungering, thirsting, and eventually persecution and then commanded His listeners to “rejoice” (v. 12) if they experienced such things! It is only when we find our joy in our obedience and commitment to Christ that we can ever be salt and light to our dark and decaying world. If we truly are the “light of the world” (v. 14), do we then bear some responsibility for the dark conditions through which we now find ourselves pursuing the Kingdom of God?

Prayer Emphasis: Consider how we will intentionally let our “light” shine in this very dark world. **Make a promise** now to be a light to someone today as you continue your **Kingdom Pursuit**. **Live** today as if tomorrow will be the day you stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ!

Day 9: Matthew 5:17-30

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” (Matthew 5:17-18)

For the record, you will see the words “fulfill” and “fulfilled” in today’s focus verses, and they will not appear again until we reach chapter eight. Various translations of the Bible begin verse 19 with “whoever,” “whosoever,” or “anyone.” In the strictest sense of the word, Jesus was saying that there is no person to whom He is not referring when He makes these statements on the importance of man’s obedience to God’s Word! The Bible teaches that anyone who disrespects and disobeys God’s Laws, and then makes spiritual excuses for doing so, should be considered “least” (or least significant) in the Kingdom of Heaven. There are no exceptions to this rule. One may remain well-known and popular in the organizations of this world, and appear to be a leader even among God’s people, but it is where we stand in God’s eyes that should matter most of all. Our daily walk should be one that recognizes that God is watching. However, He sees more than just our actions. He sees the inward motivations of our hearts. Our daily walk must be one that is beyond that of the ultra-religious scribes and Pharisees whose works were nothing more than a showcase for their spiritual trophy cases. Long before sin can ever reign in our mortal body, it must be allowed to reign in our heart. Murder must be committed in our *heart* before it can ever be manifested through our *hands*. In the same way, sins like adultery begin with our entertaining wrong thoughts and desires long before it manifests itself through sinful activity.

Prayer Emphasis: Determine that today will be the last day for any bitter resentment or wrong thoughts to control your mind and actions. **Realize** that no one can entertain wrong *attitudes* without soon participating in wrong *actions*. **Eliminate** anger and resentment from your daily thought life.

Day 10: Matthew 5:31-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,” (Matthew 5:43-44)

Today’s verses deal with some very delicate issues. These issues remain just as delicate, if not more so, in our present society as they were in the days when Jesus first taught on them. There are many opinions about divorce, oaths (swearing), retaliation (vengeance), and even the way that we should treat our enemies. It is interesting to see how the Lord deals with these subjects. Four times Jesus expressed opinions on these subjects in this sermon. Notice that after mentioning man’s positions on these subjects, Jesus began four statements with the word “but.” Three times He said, “But I say to you,” and once He said, “But I tell you.” Perhaps one of the most difficult things for any of us to do is to look beyond what we have been taught from men and look directly to the Lord for our understanding of such delicate subjects. It does the church no good whatsoever to argue over these points. It might be that Jesus would hear our opinions and then say, “But this is what I have to say on the matter.” Notice that the Lord’s standards are truly the highest standards. It would serve us well to seek His opinion and approval above all others. If you have made peace with God about your past, do not let the opinions of others cause you to doubt what God has said to you or the work of reconciliation that He has done in your heart.

Prayer Emphasis: Look for ways to encourage others who have had painful experiences in life. Let people know that there are no second-rate citizens in God’s Kingdom!

Day 11: Matthew 6:1-15

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:9-13)

Verse 10 of today’s reading contains the key to our **Kingdom Pursuit**. Three simple words make up one of the most profound statements in the Bible. The phrase “Your kingdom come” holds the key to every motivation for the church as well as for the heart of every individual Christian. The phrase is immediately followed with the words, “Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.” Can you imagine living in a world that operated the way things operate in Heaven? Heaven is a place where God’s will is *always* done and where it is always done *with the right attitude* and as the result of the *right motivations*. No one in heaven is doing what they are doing just because they have to! Those who are blessed to reside there are doing all they do because it is their desire to serve the King! We all need to understand our divine responsibility to bring as much heaven to this world as possible. Note that one of the key points to our **Kingdom Pursuit** is forgiveness. Is there someone that you need to forgive today? If so, why not bring a little bit of heaven into someone’s life by releasing him or her from the guilt and shame that he or she may sense over some past offense or sin?

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** for God to give you “thick skin” today. **Refuse** to allow offenses to hinder you from serving Christ. **Experience** the blessing of truly forgiving someone today.

Day 12: Matthew 6:16-34

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (Matthew 6:16)

Of all the disciplines Christ taught, fasting is probably one of the least understood and certainly one of the least practiced! Like everything else in our Christian practice, fasting is not something that is done to make us appear spiritual in the eyes of others. Hence, we are told that our fasting should be kept between us and God. If we insist on fasting to appear spiritual to others, that is exactly what our reward will be. We will *appear* to be spiritual. That may be good enough for us, but it is certainly not good enough for God! Notice the teachings that follow these words on true fasting. True fasting will help us understand true treasure. It will help us understand that our eyes should be focused on things other than what is necessary to make our *physical* man function. True fasting helps us better serve our Lord and Savior and to discontinue our focus on material things. Most importantly, true fasting helps us in our **Kingdom Pursuit** by helping us see that we can put spiritual things above material things. There are many ways to fast. You can go without food for multiple days or for maybe just one meal. You can fast from certain foods that you enjoy or from an activity that is important to you. The key to fasting is what you do with the time you gain from not pursuing the postponed activity. Why not take a lunch time to spend with God? Why not turn the television off during one of your favorite shows and spend that time talking with God?

Prayer Emphasis: **Ask** yourself, “How long has it been since I actually got down on my knees and prayed to God?” As a church, let’s **bow before Him** today and **seek** His every blessing.

Day 13: Matthew 7:1-14

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

Let's begin our thoughts on these verses by considering some of the last words we read today. Jesus mentions “the way which leads to life” and then adds “there are few who find it.” To understand the verse, we need to understand what it is that only a few find. The original word for “find” in verse 14 is in the present participle form in the Greek language. It is a word tense that expresses continuous or repeated action. So the idea presented here is that there are few who *continuously* walk the straight and narrow path that is demanded by our Lord and His teachings. It is important to note that today's verses clearly teach that the path then, that few are “continuously finding,” is a path that is absent of judgmental thinking and fully committed to prayer. In this passage, Jesus begins by condemning our sitting in critical judgment of others and asks us to examine our own lives as closely as we examine the lives of others. This kind of self-examination would surely drive us all to a place of prayer. It is in prayer that we learn to grow in our kindness and forgiveness of our fellow believers, and all people in general, and learn to truly treat others as we would have them treat us.

Prayer Emphasis: Search out the noble path today. Ask God to help you to be more consistent in your thoughts and actions towards others. Establish accountability with someone today by asking them to help you pray about the matter of being judgmental toward others. Refuse to join in on conversations that are critical of others.

Day 14: Matthew 7:15-29

“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:17-20)

Who among us does not desire to avoid living the two lifestyles that are described in the early part of today's reading? The first is a life that professes faith but lacks evidence thereof. The second is a life that looks very Christian but lacks any genuine motivation to serve God and others. The proper foundation for any Christian activity is the Word of God. The teachings of the Bible must be both heard and practiced by all who desire to follow Christ. We may become very good at making excuses for the way we choose to live, but Jesus clearly said, “Every good tree bears good fruit!” It is only because a “tree” bears “good fruit” that it can be identified as a “good tree.” You know something about the tree because you can clearly identify the fruit that it bears. So it is with the life and witness of every Christian. We can appear to be one thing but not actually bear any fruit that provides the evidence that we are truly what we profess to be. According to the words of Jesus in verse 21, there are those who call Jesus “Lord” and yet miss the glory of heaven. The last part of verse 21 clearly states that a Christian's personal testimony is based more on what he or she “does” than on what he or she “says.” The closing verses of today's chapter make it very obvious to us that even those who are most obedient to the teachings of Jesus still face the typical trials and tribulations that come in life and no one is exempt from the storms and trials of life.

Prayer Emphasis: Look back at the difficult times in life and review the lessons learned through your struggles. Commit now to live faithfully in spite of any difficult circumstances or situations you may face. Seek out a way to help someone who is facing difficult times right now.

Day 15: Matthew 8:1-13

“And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” (Matthew 8:2-3)

Today we read the story of two men. The first man is described in our focus verses as a leper who came to Christ with a firm belief that Jesus could heal him. However, even though this man seemed certain that Jesus *could* heal him, he seemed to question whether or not Jesus *would* heal him. Like so many of us today, this man believed very strongly that Jesus could help people, but he wondered if Jesus would help *him*. Perhaps his concern was that Jesus would not want to touch a leper, and since so much of the Lord’s healing miracles included His laying His hands on the people, He might not be willing to heal him. In other words, this man was absolutely convinced that his healing was *possible* but doubtful that it was very *probable*. In Bible times, the life of a leper was one of complete separation from those who were afraid of being contaminated by them. The second man mentioned in today’s reading (vs. 5-13) was a man of means who simply stated his need to the Savior and asked for his help. He does not seem to doubt what Jesus can or will do for him. In fact, his faith in the Lord was so strong that he understood Jesus could bring healing to his servant by simply stating that he should be healed. The NIV records our Lord’s response to this second man’s plea for help in this way: “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” Such a statement should lead us to ask ourselves: “How strong is my faith and belief in the power of God to transform lives?”

Prayer Emphasis: Take time today to **ask God** to meet the needs of someone other than yourself. **Earnestly pray** for someone with a physical need and then **let them know** that you are praying for them.

Day 16: Matthew 8:14-27

“Now when Jesus had come into Peter’s house, He saw his wife’s mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.” (Matthew 8:14-15)

There are two things that should be noted when we read our way through the New Testament. First, we should always note what Jesus did for people. Second, we should always note how those people responded to what Jesus did for them. In today’s Scripture reading, there are two very right responses of which to note and from which to learn. First, we have the story of Peter’s mother-in-law. She is healed because Jesus first “saw” her and then “touched” her. Immediately after being touched and healed by the touch of *His* hands, we find her using *her* hands to serve Him. First, He saw a need in her life and met it, and then she saw a need to serve Him and met His needs to the best of her ability. Then, in the latter part of our reading, we find Jesus getting into a boat and His disciples, without question or complaint, following Him. As it might often be for those who seek to follow Christ, “suddenly a great tempest arose” (v. 24), and the waters were made very rough. The “great tempest” was so bad that the disciples, several of whom were seasoned fishermen, considered themselves to be in danger of dying. When they brought their fears to the attention of Christ, He rebuked them for their *little* faith and *large* fears. However, in spite of their doubts and fears, He still spoke to the wind and the waves and they obeyed His command and ceased from their raging. The disciples were amazed and “marveled” at the Lord’s power over the wind and sea. We are told that, at the Lord’s command, the “great tempest” was followed by “a great calm” (v. 26).

Prayer Emphasis: **Think** about Christ and all that He has done for you. **Ask Him** to give you great faith that will survive any stormy seas you might encounter while on your own **Kingdom Pursuit**.

Day 17: Matthew 8:28 - 9:8

“When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs...Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’” (Matthew 8:28 & 9:2)

There are several men mentioned in today’s reading, but three of them are discussed in detail. Two are troubled by *demons* and the third is plagued by *disease*. The first two were walking in very destructive ways, and the other could not walk at all. Meeting Christ made a definite difference in the lives of each of these men and the difference was one well noted by those who knew them. In the case of the first two men, the whole town was moved to discussion about the amazing change that Christ made in their lives. In the case of the latter, the witnesses were filled with awe and began to praise God for what they had seen and heard. Like the men in our story, *our* lives can be a powerful witness to the power of Christ to heal and help those who are in desperate need. *We* can be living testimonies of all that Christ can do for those who will only *come* to Him – or as in the case of the paralyzed man – for those who are *brought* to Him! Upon hearing the story of the healing of the first men, “the whole city came out to meet Jesus” (8:34). After seeing the miracle that Christ performed for the paralyzed man, “the multitudes...marveled and glorified God” (9:8).

Prayer Emphasis: Take a long **look** in the mirror today and **ask God** to make the person in your mirror a living testimony to the power of God to transform lives. Find a way to **introduce** a testimony of something wonderful that Christ has done for you into a conversation with someone today. Make sure to **tell** the story in such a way that only Christ is glorified! Amen!

Day 18: Matthew 9:9-17

“As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him.” (Matthew 9:9)

Look carefully at the first words of today’s reading and you will see that Jesus was leaving one ministry opportunity when He was immediately confronted by another. As He left His meeting with the paralyzed man, He came across Matthew sitting at his tax collector’s booth. It is most probable that Matthew had already heard much about Jesus, and perhaps even about what He had just done for the paralyzed man that had been brought to Him by his friends. Whatever the case, when Jesus asked Matthew to follow Him, that is exactly what he did – for the rest of his life! Although not much is ever said about it, we must assume that Matthew’s decision to follow Christ led to the *excluding* of some things from his life. He would no longer make a pledge of loyalty to the Roman government, and he would no longer collect revenues for them from his family and friends. His decision was to no longer *sit* at a booth for the Roman government, but to forever *stand* for Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven! Matthew’s willingness to follow Christ also led to some new things being *included* in his life. It is obvious that Matthew invited Jesus into his home for dinner because we see that “Jesus sat at the table in (Matthew’s) house” (v. 10). You can read more about this dinner in Luke 5, where this meal is described as “a great feast,” and we are told “there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them” (Luke 5:29).

Prayer Emphasis: Can you **think** of a creative way that you can get some of your friends, neighbors, family members, or co-workers to a place where they can learn more about Jesus? **Be mindful** of who you see and meet along life’s way and **look** for opportunities to **witness** for Christ.

Day 19: Matthew 9:18-34

“While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live.’ So Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples.” (Matthew 9:18-19)

Take another look at the focus verses for today and make note of the fact that it was while Jesus was already busy ministering in one place that He was asked to come and minister in another! Then look again at the verses that follow and you will see that while He was on His way to minister in that second place, yet another individual He encountered along the way was ministered to and healed by His miraculous power. As we read through the Gospel of Matthew, we will see Jesus touching many lives in miraculous ways. A ruler’s daughter will be brought back from the dead, a woman with an incurable disease will be healed, two blind men will receive their sight, and a man who could not talk would have his speech restored. Can you imagine having so many wonderful things being done and so many people being helped without understanding just how busy our Lord was while He lived on this earth? It is true that one ministry opportunity usually leads to another, and another, and yet another! All of us could be more involved in miraculous things if it were truly our desire to be used in such ways. All along life’s way, we encounter people with severe needs. While we may not always be able to bring *healing* into their lives, we can certainly bring *help* to them in their time of need.

Prayer Emphasis: Make some time in your day to **do something** for a suffering brother or sister in Christ and let them know that it was Jesus who inspired you to do it. **Realize** that a very busy Savior deserves to have very busy servants!

Day 20: Matthew 9:35 - 10:1

“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.” (Matthew 9:35)

It is impossible to read today’s verses without noticing that Jesus “went about *all* the cities and villages” and “healing *every* sickness and *every* disease among the people.” Take a moment to allow the enormity of those statements to soak in and saturate your mind with the amazing power and ability that accompanied Jesus everywhere He went! Words like those we read today help us realize the scope of Christ’s ministry and mission. Surely the harvest was plentiful! However, a *plentiful* harvest requires *plenty* of laborers. For this reason, Jesus requested His disciples to “pray (that) the Lord of the harvest (would) send out laborers into His harvest” (9:38). The prayer request that Jesus shared with His disciples in those days is officially shared with us when we read those words for ourselves. We should all be praying that more and more people – beginning with ourselves – would become involved in the harvesting of lost souls for Christ. I have never been involved in a church ministry that did not need more workers, and I thank God for that fact! When God does much *for* us, it is only fair that He be allowed to request much *from* us! However, we learn from the Lord that praying is not all that we are requested to do. Jesus called His 12 disciples to Him and empowered them to do exactly the same things He had been doing. Multiple workers enhance our ability to do more work for Christ and in a timelier fashion. The time for reaping will soon be past so we must do all that we can for Christ now!

Prayer Emphasis: **Think** of *something* you can do for God and then think of *someone* you can enlist to help you do it! **Look** for an opportunity to **enroll** someone in God’s work today or to **encourage** someone who is already doing it!

Day 21: Matthew 10:2-15

“Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;” (Matthew 10:3)

The listing of the names of the apostles is found in four different places in the New Testament. After the listing that we read today in Matthew, the names of the apostles are listed again in Mark 3, Luke 6, and then once more in Acts 1. Of course, the listing in Acts 1 omits the name of Judas since he was already dead at that time. Each of the listings differ slightly, but only in minor ways. However, there is one difference in Matthew’s account that stands out from all the others. In every listing other than Matthew’s, his name is mentioned with no comment. But in Matthew’s gospel, he alone adds the title of his former occupation after his name. He alone refers to himself as “Matthew the tax collector.” It is almost as if Matthew believed that his past required some kind of asterisk be placed beside his name so that everyone would know he was the same man who had been an extortionist and traitor to his own people. Like this good man, many of us maintain what I call a “Matthew Mentality” today. We simply cannot let go of the guilt and shame of the past and move on to serve God in our new calling. As you read the latter part of today’s scriptures, you could clearly see that Jesus gave the same commission and authority to all 12 of the apostles. There were to be no second-rate citizens among those who were called to follow Christ.

Prayer Emphasis: Let today be the first day of your personal **Kingdom Pursuit** where you leave the baggage of guilt and shame in the past and **walk** as the called, empowered person that Christ means for you to be! **Thank God** that your sins are forgiven and *forgotten!*

Day 22: Matthew 10:16-27

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16)

Our **Kingdom Pursuit** is not without perils! Christ never hesitated to warn His followers that they would face many hardships and trials if they decided to follow and serve Him. No follower of Christ will ever encounter trials and be able to say that they had not been forewarned that such trials would surely come. Earlier in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus warned His followers to “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (7:15). So, there we read that we should be aware that there might sometimes be some wolves among the sheep. Paul would later warn the Ephesian believers that “savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). Today’s Scripture contains an interesting twist to the “wolves among the sheep” story. Here Jesus clearly told His disciples that He was going to “send (them) out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” While the “wolves” that tried to mingle with the sheep sought to “disguise” themselves, we Christians are not afforded the benefit of any kind of disguise whatsoever. In fact, Christians are to go out “in the midst of wolves” and make every effort to be readily and easily identifiable as Christians. We are to go out into this world and live “in the midst of” the wolves as openly and honestly as possible. There is no place for an undercover Christian in God’s service. In other words, God has no secret agent Christians employed in His business of taking the gospel to the world, so you might as well go ahead and boldly let your light shine!

Prayer Emphasis: Determine to have the courage to **live** a distinctively Christian lifestyle in a world that might not understand all that you say or do – or even all that you *refuse* to say or do. **Seek** to be “100% wool” (sheep) in each and every situation and relationship in your life.

Day 23: Matthew 10:28-42

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:42)

We live in a world where far too much is taken for granted – even among those who are faithful members of the Kingdom of God! A cup of water is a very small matter to those of us living in our modern world today. However, it would have been considered a precious gift in the days of Christ. And to receive water that was “cold” would be a special treat, indeed! The word translated “cold” in today’s reading comes from a Greek word that is found only here and then twice in Revelation 3:15–16 where Christ states He would rather us be “cold or hot” but never lukewarm. So, the idea here is that one would be offering the “little ones” something that would be refreshing. And that is exactly what the Lord intended for the ministry of His disciples to be to the very thirsty world in which they lived. As it was with them, so should it be with us. Our ministry should be a refreshing blessing to those whom we seek to help. Keep in mind that the term “little ones” used here was not necessarily a reference to children but to all who might be considered to be insignificant and unimportant to the society in which they lived. Apparently James had to remind the early Christians in Jerusalem to show Christian kindness and love to all people and not just to those who appeared to be more fortunate than others (James 2:1-9).

Prayer Emphasis: Spend the day **thinking** about the way we offer our witness to those we meet. **Choose** to be like a refreshing cup of cold water to a very thirsty world. Realize, though, that it is difficult for “cold” water to spring forth from a “lukewarm” heart! **Ask God** to keep your personal walk *fresh* so others might find your personal witness *refreshing*.

Day 24: Matthew 11:1-11

“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matthew 11:11)

Today, we read about Jesus and the apostles going out “to teach and to preach in their cities” (v. 1). What is most remarkable about this courageous act is they are doing it while they know John the Baptist was sitting in prison for having done the same thing. Verse three says that John sent some of his followers to ask Jesus, “Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?” Jesus told the messengers to “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (vs. 4-5). All those things provided evidence that Christ was indeed the One who was to come! Jesus sent an encouraging word to his beloved cousin, urging him to remain strong and to fully expect the blessing that comes to those who do so. As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus turned to the crowd and began to share His innermost feelings about John and his ministry. He revealed that John was the one of whom Malachi had prophesied who would be the forerunner for Christ. He added this to His confirmation of John’s ministry: “Among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist!” Note that Jesus made these comments *as* John’s disciples were leaving and not *after* they had already left. It seems that Jesus wanted these words to be spoken to John the Baptist.

Prayer Emphasis: **Think** about how important it is to receive an encouraging word and then do two things. First, **think** of someone who has been an encouragement to you and take the time to call and **thank them**. Then, **ask God** to reveal to you someone who might need to hear an encouraging word today and **encourage** them in their **Kingdom Pursuit**.

Day 25: Matthew 11:12-24

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” (Matthew 11:12-13)

Notice the words “until now” in verse 12 of our reading. From these words, we get an indication that John’s ministry was the end of one era and his death, and cessation of ministry, marked the beginning of a new era. John was the last of a legacy of men who faithfully preached the Word of God to generations and people who were less than responsive to a prophet’s call for repentance. In fact, the preaching of these men often brought *persecution* and seldom *praise* from those who heard them. Jesus likened the generation to whom He preached to “children sitting in the marketplaces” who never seemed to be pleased with anything that anyone did (v. 16)! Verse 18 teaches that this generation disliked John the Baptist because he “came neither eating or drinking” and then verse 19 teaches that these same people disliked Jesus because He did! People were seldom pleased with the actions of John the Baptist or Jesus! If Jesus or John the Baptist couldn’t please everyone, then who are we to think that we could be capable of doing so? Jesus then began to rebuke some of the cities “in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent” (v. 20). He was especially critical of Capernaum, a city which was “exalted to heaven” (v. 23) because it had been His primary residence and His personal headquarters after His public ministry began. If people disapproved of the ministry practices of our Lord Jesus, why should we expect less? If our **Kingdom Pursuit** should lead us down paths of persecution and rejection, then we are in good company!

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** today and **commit** yourself to remaining true to God’s calling upon your life no matter the circumstances you may face. **Notice** that Jesus remarks that those who were eyewitnesses to his personal ministry would be without excuse when they stood before God. Clearly **communicate** God’s love to the world around you so they will be without excuse when they see Him. **Share** something about Jesus with someone you see today.

Day 26: Matthew 11:25 - 12:8

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus says, “Come to me...and I will give you rest.” That is a blessed promise that is often claimed by those who have no right to claim it. If we quote that verse just as I wrote it in the first sentence of this devotional, then we are leaving out a very important phrase that clearly identifies to whom this promise is made. The statement, in whole, promises the Lord’s “rest” to those “who labor and are heavy laden.” While there are many Christians who desire to claim this promise, there are few who are actually qualified to do so. Perhaps the most blessed thing about this promised rest is that it is for our *souls*. We can take our vacations and holidays to rest and refresh our bodies, but there is only one place to which we can look for refreshment for our souls! This rest that we so desperately need is not found in a *place*, but in a *Person*. Jesus declares Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath. For those who would struggle with sensing God’s acceptance, they can know that it can be ours because Christ lived a life that has satisfied God’s every demand.

Prayer Emphasis: **Be watchful** for those who struggle with their failures and then **be mindful** to **share** with them that someone has already faced their spiritual struggles for them. As we continue in our own **Kingdom Pursuit**, we will surely meet many who need to learn that true rest is found only in Christ.

Day 27: Matthew 12:9-21

“Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.” (Matthew 12:13)

More than once we learn of miracles received that were preceded by a request or command from Jesus. Here, Jesus said to a man He met in the synagogue, “Stretch out your hand.” This is only the second time the word for “stretch forth” is found in the New Testament. We encountered it earlier with the leper whom Jesus “put out his hand and touched” (8:3). In that miracle, Jesus reached out His hand to the leper. Now, in this miracle, Jesus tells this man to reach out his hand to Him. And when the man obeyed that simple command of Christ, his hand was “restored,” meaning it was “restored as whole as the other.” The Greek word translated “whole” finds its root in a word that means to grow, increase, or become greater. I love to imagine this man’s “withered hand” growing and becoming stronger right in front of the eyes of the people! But there is a much broader, spiritual application to be made from this story. We must ask ourselves, “How much more could *we* grow as individuals and as a church body if we would only learn to stretch a bit and reach out to Jesus?” And think what an impact it would have on the world around us if they could actually see us growing stronger in Christ right before their eyes? (Just a hint: You might want to look for the word “fulfilled” in today’s verses. This will be the first time we have read it since chapter eight!)

Prayer Emphasis: Take a moment during your **Kingdom Pursuit** today to **ask** the Lord how you can best **pray** for our church and its ministries. When you speak with fellow church families or members, be sure to **discuss** ways we can strengthen our church and its ability to reach out to others.

Day 28: Matthew 12:22-32

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32)

Depending on how one chooses to punctuate it, verse 31 of our reading contains what might sound like a very simple statement when it says, “every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men.” How much simpler the understanding of this statement would be if there really was a *period* at the end of that statement and not the *comma* or *colon* that is found in most translations. Because there is a comma, and not a period, those eight words are a phrase and not a sentence. The sentence is only complete when you add the following warning, “but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.” As harsh as that statement may seem, it is not that difficult to understand. The sin that cannot be forgiven is the sin of rejecting Christ. In John 3:18, we are clearly told that those who believe will never stand condemned before God but those who refuse to believe are condemned already. Why? Is it because they have committed sins so severe and wicked that God cannot forgive them? No! They are condemned because they refused to accept Christ as their personal Savior! We are told by Jesus that we are born of the Spirit. How can one be born of the Spirit if he rejects the Spirit? To *blaspheme* means to slander or to speak evil or reproachfully against someone. To reject the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is to reject God. To reject God is to reject His free gift of salvation.

Prayer Emphasis: See if you can find a way to **mention** the fact that Christ can forgive any sin in a conversation today. Be sure to **mention** the importance of the Holy Spirit in your life!

Day 29: Matthew 12:33-45

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’”
(Matthew 12:38)

We are recognized, or *known*, as Christians by the fruit that we bear. Just like a tree can be easily identified by the fruit that hangs from its branches, so should a Christian be easily identified by the fruit they produce. A faithful believer will be clearly identified by the good fruit that he or she produces. Just as surely as we know the difference between apples and oranges, people know the difference between good and bad. In today’s reading, we find the religious leaders asking Jesus to show them some “sign” by asking Him to do something to provide authentication that He was who He professed to be. Verse 39 reveals that Jesus told these men that “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign” and then told them there was a coming “sign” that would clearly identify Him to be the Messiah! It would be the “sign of the prophet Jonah” that would be the final, convincing proof of His true identity. This sign would be fulfilled by His resurrection from the dead. We, too, are to be bearing identifying fruit – something that can be a “sign” of authentication that we are what and who we claim to be. This fruit is not something that we can bring forth on our own. It requires the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. We are filled with the Spirit of God as we fill our hearts with the Word of God. As you read your Bible daily, God fills your heart with His power and presence. We, then, can begin to speak from the *abundance of our hearts* and be witnesses to others as we go about our **Kingdom Pursuit**.

Prayer Emphasis: Be patient in your speaking today. **Test** your words before you launch them. **Ask** the Holy Spirit to help you **exhibit** Christian fruit today.

Day 30: Matthew 12:46 - 13:8

“And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables...” (Matthew 13:2-3)

Seeing the “great multitudes” that “gathered together” to hear Him preach, Jesus “spoke many things to them.” However, He chose to speak those “many things” to them “in parables.” Since we read of great “multitudes,” we can assume this was a large gathering, and probably larger than usual. Since we read that He “spoke many things” to them, we might assume that not everything He said to them on this day is recorded for us here in Matthew. And since He spoke to them in “parables” we can assume that not every one of the parables He spoke at gatherings such as this are included in this brief New Testament story. I am reminded of the closing words of the Book of John where we read, “And there are also many things (plural) that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). There is a very important lesson to be learned from one of the parables that Matthew was led by the Spirit to include in His gospel, that being the parable of the sower. Jesus spoke of a farmer who went forth to sow the same type seed in four different types of soil. As you read the story, you will see that some seeds produced no fruit at all while some seeds produced fruit that remained for only short periods of time. But here is the point. Ultimately, *only 25 percent* of the seed sown resulted in fruit. We are wrong to become discouraged because every witness, every sermon, every good deed does not result in a life being changed into a fruit bearing believer!

Prayer Emphasis: Think of someone in our church that you could **encourage** today and then take the time to **do** it! **Think** of someone who may need to hear the gospel and **pray** for an opportunity to **speak** to him or her about Christ.

Day 31: Matthew 13:9-23

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear...Therefore hear the parable of the sower.” (Matthew 13:9 & 18)

One of the greatest blessings that we have from God is also one of the least appreciated. Can you imagine how drastically different our lives would be if we lost our ability to hear? Today’s reading begins with Jesus saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” We know that the “ears” that Jesus was referencing here were not the ones on the sides of our heads but the ones inside our hearts. In other words, Jesus was not referring to physical hearing, but to spiritual hearing. It is the spiritual ear that has the ability to understand the teachings of Christ. Jesus would privately explain the parable of the sower to His disciples in the closing verses of our reading. From His explanation, we can gather that the difference between the seed that produced much fruit and the seed that produced nothing was found not in the *seed* itself, but, rather, in the *soil* into which the seed had been sown. The different soils represented the different heart attitudes of those who listened to the teachings of Jesus. Those heart attitudes ranged from the one who heard and did not understand or respond to the gospel at all to the heart attitude of one who hears and fully responds to the gospel message and the call of God to service and fruit bearing. In between, we find the sad stories of some who hear the word but do not let it take root in their lives and then others who hear the word, respond to it, and then allow the many distractions of this world to reduce their lives to a level of no spiritual productivity at all.

Prayer Emphasis: If you have been blessed to hear God’s message of salvation, and to embrace it fully, then take some time today to **thank God** for giving you the ears to hear. **Realize** that it is only by God’s grace that you have become a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ. God’s grace is truly amazing!

Day 32: Matthew 13:24-33

“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.’” (Matthew 13:24-25)

There are two main characters in the parable of the wheat and the tares. The first, a farmer who “sowed good seed in his field.” The second is a foe (“enemy”) that came behind him in the cover of darkness “and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.” I say that this foe worked under the cover of darkness because he did this “while men slept.” The “tares” that the enemy planted were probably a plant commonly referred to in Bible times as “darnel.” This plant was of the wheat family, and was virtually indistinguishable from wheat until it began to produce a fruit. The fruit of the darnel and the wheat were dissimilar enough to allow workers to distinguish between the two plants and then go through the field and remove only the tares without mistakenly uprooting the wheat at the same time. That is why, when the workers asked, “Do you want us...to go and gather them (the tares) up?” (v. 28), the wise farmer told them to “Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (v. 30). I pray that God will grant us the wisdom and patience to wait until it is harvest time before we try to separate the tares from the wheat! We can become so zealous in *rooting out* the wrong people that we wind up *running away* many of the good people!

Prayer Emphasis: As we go about our **Kingdom Pursuit**, let’s try to **remember** to focus more on our own lives and not to judge the lives of others. If there are any disingenuous people among us, God will sort them out by carefully examining their fruit!

Day 33: Matthew 13:34-46

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:45-46)

The first verse in today’s reading tells us that Jesus, once again, “spoke to the multitudes in *parables*.” The two words “is like” that are found in today’s focus verses remind us that the short story about the merchant finding “the pearl of great price” was indeed a parable. There are two such short parables in today’s verses and a third one that we will read at the beginning of tomorrow’s Scripture. You can readily identify each one of them by locating the words “is like” and circling them. I often think that teaching in parables was the best way to hold the attention of the people. In Bible times, everyone knew a “merchant,” and it probably made the story more personal to them as they could, at least in their minds, put a face to the characters that Jesus included. The merchant in today’s story is said to be seeking “beautiful pearls” – those that were of the highest quality and value and would bring a “great price” in the marketplace. When he finds one such pearl, he does everything within his power to obtain it. The word that is translated *price* (or value in some translations) comes from a Greek word that is only found twice in the New Testament. It is first found in today’s reading and then again in John 12:3 where the ointment that Mary used to anoint the feet of Christ was described as “very costly.” It would do us all well to be constantly aware of the price of our salvation. Such a wonderful gift did not come without great expense! As a side note, you should be able to circle the word “fulfilled” once again in today’s verses!

Prayer Emphasis: Please **take some time** today and personally **thank God** for sending His Son to die on the cross and pay the penalty for our sins. Here is a suggestion for the most daring among us. Let’s **tell** someone the story of our personal salvation experience today! **Look** for an opportunity today to **mention** Christ or salvation in a conversation.

Day 34: Matthew 13:47-58

“Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, ‘Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?’” (Matthew 13:53-54)

Back in 12:9-10, we read about Jesus visiting a synagogue and healing a man with a withered hand. In 12:15, we saw where “great multitudes followed Him” when He left that synagogue. The people that followed Him from that meeting became the “great multitudes” to whom Jesus spoke the parables that we have been reading. In today’s verses, we find Jesus returning to a synagogue – specifically the synagogue that was located in “His own country.” One might imagine that this was a very high attendance day since the multitudes probably continued to follow Him wherever He went. While in His hometown synagogue, “He taught them,” and the people were “astonished” at His teaching and began to question the source of His “wisdom” and His ability to perform “mighty works.” They could not fathom how one could be the son of a common carpenter and also possess such detailed knowledge of the Old Testament writings. Note specifically their question recorded in verse 55: “Is this not the carpenter’s son?” There were probably many rumors and much innuendo about who the father of Mary’s child was, but I am sure very few of the people were saying He was the begotten Son of God!

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that there are still many people who have serious questions about who Jesus really was. First and foremost, **learn** for yourself who Jesus really is – and personally **allow** Him to be who He really should be in your life – your Savior *and* your Lord!

Day 35: Matthew 14:1-13

“Then his disciples came and took away the body (of John the Baptist) and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus first heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities.” (Matthew 14:12-13)

We might think that the longer we travel down life’s road, faithfully following Jesus, the farther behind us any trials and tribulations may become. Some think that becoming a spiritual person means that we might encounter less sorrow and heartbreak along life’s way. However, a careful look at the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus certainly strips that theory of any possible validity! Upon learning of the cruel death of John the Baptist, Jesus “departed” from where He was and withdrew to “a deserted place by Himself.” Some translations refer to the place of solitude to which Jesus went as “a desert place.” The first time the Greek word for “desert” appears in the New Testament manuscripts is in Matthew 3:1, where it is used to describe the place where John resided before he began his preaching ministry. So, perhaps Jesus went there to think about and remember His older cousin and to mourn his loss. As a side note, I have often wondered if the “disciples” of John who buried his body and then “went and told Jesus” might have been some of the same disciples that served as John’s messengers when John was on death row in prison wanting to know if Jesus was “the Coming One” or if they should continue to “look for another” (11:2-3). If so, it might have been that they came wondering why Jesus had seemingly stood by and allowed His faithful servant to die such a gruesome death.

Prayer Emphasis: Consider some of the important people in your life – faces and places that bring to mind fond and cherished memories. Let today be a day where you **remember** some of the important people in your life that are now residing with God in Heaven. **Allow** their memories to inspire you to faithfully serve the Lord with all of your ability.

Day 36: Matthew 14:14-27

“Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.” (Matthew 14:19)

In the last part of yesterday’s reading, we saw where Jesus sought to get away to “a deserted place by Himself” after the death of John the Baptist. The “multitudes” that “heard it” and “followed Him on foot from the cities” (v.13) were the same “multitudes” (v. 15) that were following Jesus when He fed 5,000 men and their families with the five loaves and two fish. This leads me to say that sometimes vacations, so called, can provide some excellent opportunities for ministry. It also leads me to say that any Christian who truly desires to be a minister of Jesus Christ is never really off the clock and should never consider themselves retired from the work of representing Jesus Christ wherever they are and to whomever they are with! From today’s verses we can readily see that wherever and whenever the multitudes followed Jesus they brought their many desperate needs along with them. Such was the case with the hungry people that are mentioned in today’s verses. Imagine feeding so many people with such meager fare! And then, as if the meal wasn’t miraculous enough, Jesus had the disciples collect leftovers enough to fill 12 baskets with food!

Prayer Emphasis: Trust God to provide in amazing ways. **Be faithful** to trust Him with material things. **Commit** to a giving plan and stick with it. **Consider** what He could do with all we have to give Him.

Day 37: Matthew 14:28 - 15:3

“And Peter answered Him (Jesus) and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.” (Matthew 14:28-29)

How many times have we been right where Peter was at the moment that we read about today? Peter looked out across the waves and lifted his voice to say, “Lord, *if it is You*, command me come to You on the water.” We have all had our moments when Christ came to us in our own “storms” only to find that it is sometimes difficult to be sure we are truly *seeing* the Lord in the storm and actually *hearing* His voice over the sound of the turbulent storms that sometimes surround us. However, we should all have the faith to be confident that the Lord always *empowers* His followers to do whatever He *employs* them to do! This knowledge does not apply to only spiritual activities, for Peter asked this question in a very physical place, which was far from being a religious service. And, after asking, Peter soon learned that Jesus was just as much the Lord in a *storm* as He was in a *synagogue*! Our story reminds us that, as long as Peter kept his focus on Jesus, he was actually divinely enabled to walk on the water! But when he allowed himself to become distracted by the troublesome circumstances surrounding him, he began to sink. We are all aware of the promises contained in the Bible, but we are also sometimes doubtful as to whether or not they apply to us! We can most certainly rest assured that they do!

Prayer Emphasis: Take some time today to **consider** some of the things God has been speaking to you about lately. Has He prompted you to respond to some ministry need within the church? Has He spoken to your heart about some area of service? **Refuse** to write these thoughts off as random or insignificant. **Ask** the burning question, “Lord, is it you?” If it is, then surrender to His will today.

Day 38: Matthew 15:4-20

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” (Matthew 15:19-20)

Yesterday’s reading left us with Jesus once again having to confront the Pharisees and their religious traditions. They were concerned that the disciples of Jesus did not follow the religious custom of ceremonially washing their hands before eating their meals. They were not questioning the personal *hygiene* of the Lord’s disciples but their lack of adherence to the traditions of the “scribes and Pharisees” (v. 1). The Lord’s response to the questions of the disciples’ accusers did not mean that personal hygiene is not important but to imply that one may be ceremonially religious in the washing of their *hands* and still have a *heart* that is far from what God intends it to be. Jesus immediately pointed out how wrong it was to be more concerned about outward *appearances* than about actual *obedience* to the more important matters contained in the commandments of God. The matter of caring for parents was a significant issue to the Jewish people. To fail to do so could be punishable by the courts of law. However, the Pharisees found loopholes that would allow them to protect their assets from having to be used to care for their aging parents. As such, they created exemptions that appeared to be spiritual so they could cling to their material possessions.

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that Jesus still emphasizes clean *hearts* over clean *hands* today. Believe that true physical purity will come only when we have allowed true spiritual purity to rule in our hearts. If your parents are alive, **speak** with them today in a loving and appreciative way.

Day 39: Matthew 15:21-31

“Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon possessed.’” (Matthew 15:21-22)

What appeal could possibly be more desperate than that of a heartbroken mother for her hurting child? Jesus and His disciples were confronted by a Gentile woman who simply would not take “no” for an answer. She was so persistent in her request for help that the disciples eventually asked Jesus to comply with her request so she would go away and leave them alone. As we watch this drama continue to unfold, we see her pleas finally reduced to three desperate words in verse 25: “Lord, help me!” Today’s story provides another example of the fact that sometimes the *briefest* prayers receive some of the *biggest* answers! (Refer back to Peter’s own prayer of three words, “Lord, save me,” in 14:30 and you will see another example of what I am talking about!) The Lord spoke to the woman and argued that it was not right to take the blessings that were meant primarily for the Jewish people and give it to their Gentile neighbors. The Lord used the term “dogs” (v. 26) because the Gentiles were literally treated as dogs by those who considered themselves to be God’s chosen people. The woman’s response to this argument is moving. She accepted her place in society without forgetting God’s place in the world. It appears that she personally believed that the word “whosoever” included her and her child!

Prayer Emphasis: Are you facing some desperate situation today? Do you feel as if your problems are small and insignificant to God? Now might be the time to put away the “pretty prayers” and get down to really **asking** God for something. **Ask God** for something today in a very short and specific prayer, and do not be afraid to ask God for His help more than once!

Day 40: Matthew 15:32 - 16:4

“Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, ‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry...’” (Matthew 15:32)

When the Lord informed His disciples of His desire to feed the hungry multitudes prior to sending them away, the disciples asked, “Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?” Jesus responded to their question with a very simple question of His own by asking, “How many loaves do you have?” In today’s vernacular we might quote Jesus as asking, “What do you have at your disposal?” As a church – a body of believers who has come together to do the work of Christ – we face many such challenges today. We have many elderly members and homebound people that need ministry. We have many who are suffering and in need of physical and emotional healing. Where can we possibly find all that is needed to help these people? The answer to our question is the same as the answer to the question the Lord posed to His disciples on the day of which we are reading. We simply need to look at what we already have and find ways to use it to meet the needs of those whom Jesus loves! Each one of us – every believer in Christ – is gifted in at least one area of ministry. Can you imagine what our church ministry would be like if we all surrendered those gifts to God and asked Him to use them for His honor and glory? We have, among us, many talents and abilities. Are we using them to help others?

Prayer Emphasis: Will you **search** your own heart about the matter of becoming involved in some area of ministry within the church? Will you **commit** to help us minister to others? **Contact us** at 850-562-8069 or at gary@seminolebc.com if we can pray for you or minister to you and your family in any way.