
Day 310 - November 6

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)
Ministry from Galilee to Judea
In Jerusalem for Feast of Dedication

Readings: *Matthew 11:20-30; 19:1-2; Mark 10:1; Luke 9:51-56; 10:1-42; 11:1-13; 17:11-19; John 10:22-42*

Reflections:

- After the Feast of Dedication apparently Jesus returns from Jerusalem to Galilee and then down into Judea. He sends out seventy two disciples, an expanded ministry team, to do one more sweep through the area. The response of people remains mixed with greater signs of hostility, as should be expected as some continue to look for a military Messiah.
- Galilean ministry ends: Jesus has always been on a mission. The time is fast approaching and he sets his sights on Jerusalem and the final show down. He is resolute. When you have a goal and things get tough, the only thing that keeps you focused is being resolute in your mission. Although Jesus is rejected by a Samaritan village, a rejected people whom Jesus shows incredible grace and inclusion in his community, Jesus remains committed to mercy. His disciples want to kill them all and once again demonstrate they just don't yet get the grace of God.
- Ten lepers healed: Jesus heals ten lepers as yet another sign to the religious leaders. He actually tells them to all go to the priests to show themselves to them. Jesus is still reaching out to the religious leaders who want to kill him. Only one comes back – a Samaritan – to thank Jesus. The other nine were Israelites who selfishly received the miracle but didn't take time to say thank you. Only the Samaritan, a non-Jew, said thank you. This shows again the apathy of the Israelites by and large and the receptive heart of the Gentiles. Faith is again credited as the reason for the man's healing.
- Seventy-two sent out: Jesus sends out an expanded ministry team of seventy two disciples. Jesus had more disciples than just the twelve. He sends them in pairs underscoring again that God is not into lone rangers but prefers partnerships (see Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Jesus declares that the opportunity to reach people is huge but kingdom opportunists are few. We are to pray for God to mobilize workers to bring in a harvest of people into God's community. Jesus' commands to them are still based on the premise that they will be well received and therefore can rely on people's hospitality. The image of sending them as

“lambs among wolves” underscores again the intrinsically peaceful nature of serving in Christ’s mission. The mandate is healing and their message is the nearness of the kingdom. In other words, the Messiah is here! What if people reject them? Shake the dust off and get out because those people are going to fall under judgment. Although Jesus shows mercy again and again, his warning is always that there is a day coming for Israel when they will be judged by God. Jesus declares some of the infamous wicked cities of the Old Testament would have repented long ago if they would have experienced the magnitude of miracles Jesus performed. Religion has a way of creating spiritual calluses so that people become numb to the working of God. Jesus again affirms that they are not rejecting him but ultimately his father who sent him.

- Seventy two return: The teams return and are excited that even demons submitted to them in Jesus’ name. Jesus then expands on a bit of spiritual pre-history. He declares that he actually witnessed the fall of Satan when he was removed from heaven. Although we only have prophetic allusions to the fall of Satan (see Ezekiel 28:1-19) there is enough evidence in Scripture to confirm that Satan was at one time an angel who then rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. Jesus states that his followers have power over demonic forces symbolized as snakes and scorpions. Yet they are not to get excited about this but only rejoice in the security of their relationship with God.
- Thanks given for revelation: Jesus is full of the Spirit and praises his Father. We see here again the interdependent relationship of Father, Son and Spirit. Why is Jesus praising his Father? Because his Father did not choose the wise and educated but rather chose those who were humble and child-like. God’s pleasure was to reveal his glory and grace to the humble and meek. This is contrasted directly with Satan. This makes sense in context because Satan rebelled out of pride. Jesus remembering Satan’s fall celebrates the fact that God is going to triumph over forces of Satan through the weak and humble. God’s power is shown to be perfect in our weakness as God humbles the prideful forces of Satan through our humble and weak child-likeness. The power brokers of Israel, kings and prophets, wanted to see the coming of the Messiah but the Father and Son working together decided to reveal it to the humble and bypass the powerful and proud.
- Rest for the weary: This life of humbly trusting in God’s grace and love is freeing, emotionally restful, and easy compared to the tyranny of living under the Law with its ever compounding list of rules, regulations, rituals and routines. Being bound to Jesus means being freed to truly live and love others.
- Parable of the Good Samaritan: A religious leader wants Jesus’ answer to how a person receives eternal life. Jesus asks him how he understands the essence of the Torah. The religious leader gets it right by saying love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself. The leader may be just restating Jesus’ own position to set him up. When Jesus agrees, the religious leader asks who is his neighbor. Jesus tells a story about two religious leaders who are more obsessed with their own religious purity and laws than they are about saving the life of a wounded fellow Israelite. It takes a compassionate

Samaritan to stop and help this man. The answer is obvious. The question is not who is my neighbor but am I being a neighbor to those in need and showing them mercy. Christ-followers should look for people in need and become their neighbors and help them.

- With Martha and Mary: Jesus spends time with Martha and Mary, two women who were obviously close friends of Jesus and sisters to Lazarus. Mary takes the position of a disciple and listens at his feet. Martha works in the kitchen stressing about doing enough for Jesus rather than listening for what Jesus will do for her. We see a parallel to the story of the prodigal son as one sister is entering into the experience of acceptance, relationship and grace and the other is in her own space working to be accepted. We also see illustrated how easy it is to be in relationship with Jesus. He simply wants our friendship first and foremost. It isn't how hard we work but how we stay close to him as he does his work.
- Teaching how to pray: A disciple asks Jesus to teach him how to pray. Jesus restates essentially what he taught in the Sermon on the Mount. What are the keys? Talk to God like you would your mom or dad. Keep it simple. Keep it personal. Seek out God's leadership and be honest about your needs. This kind of prayer is not about ritual but about relationship.
- Parable of persistence: Jesus then tells a story about a neighbor bothering a friend in the night for some bread. This would have been so annoying for someone to wake you up at midnight for something as simple as bread. Yet because of the man's boldness, the neighbor gives him the bread. In other words, ask God boldly for what you need. Don't be shy.
- Praying in faith: Jesus then makes it plain that we should understand God is our loving father who wants to meet our needs. We need to go to God with our needs and ask him without fear. Jesus then makes a very important promise. The greatest thing we receive from God is his very presence, the Holy Spirit, to fill our lives with a tangible experience of God and change us from the inside out. When we ask God for this, we need to be assured that God will not allow the enemy to deceive us. God will not allow an unclean spirit (symbolized by a snake or scorpion) to enter into our lives but will only allow the Holy Spirit to enter into our lives. This is a key promise to understand as some people are afraid of experiencing the power of God personally because of the fear of being deceived by the enemy. Jesus assures his followers that all we need to do is ask God and trust God's heart to respond to us, protecting us in the process.
- Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah. This feast was started in 164 BCE by Judas Maccabaeus after the temple had been cleansed and restored after it was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes. It would have been a festival where the people were remembering the importance of having a pure and holy temple as a place to worship God.
- Jesus affirms own deity: Jesus is near the temple and the religious leaders again ask him if he is the Messiah. Jesus won't answer them directly but simply states that they don't believe because they are not in relationship with God. Those who are in relationship are like sheep that are secure in their relationship with their shepherd. Jesus then states plainly that he and the Father are one. Again Jesus makes it clear that he is God with us, Emmanuel.

- **Attempt to stone Jesus:** The religious leaders want to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Jesus defends himself by quoting Psalm 82:6 that used the term “gods” to describe the judges of Israel through whom God spoke. They were called god because God was speaking through them to the community. Jesus uses a rabbinic form of argument to argue from the lesser to the greater. He basically says that if they as religious leaders accepted that leaders in the Old Testament could be called gods because God spoke through them (this is the lesser) how much more should Jesus who is actually God with us, the word become flesh, the one and only Son of God, be called God (the greater)? Jesus was not arguing that everyone should be called God as he is called God or that he was affirming the divine presence was in him like everyone else. He was arguing that he as God with us, uniquely one with the Father, deserved to be called God. The religious leaders understood this clearly as they then try to seize Jesus to kill him and he again escapes.
- **To Perea:** Jesus returns across the Jordan to where John the Baptizer had gathered a following previously. Many of John’s disciples rally to Jesus and we see again in their faith in Jesus the contrast between faith of the irreligious, anti-temple movement that John started and unbelief of the religious leaders. Over and over again we see that some people get it and others don’t. If people have bonded with their own sense of righteousness and control through religion, they become spiritually blinded to Jesus’ grace-based approach to relationship with God and each other.