

October

October 1

Matthew 1-4

If a person were to start reading the Bible with the New Testament, what a boring first chapter they'd find! These names wouldn't mean much. If you start with the Old Testament, though, many of these names have a lot of history behind them. To see Rahab (the prostitute), Ruth (from Moab), Manasseh (who hated God's ways), and some of the other famous persons of the Old Testament in the family line of Jesus Christ, you see the depth of His Jewish lineage.

Verse 1:19 calls Joseph a righteous man, then explains "righteous" in two ways. First, he did his best to follow, with mercy, the Laws of Moses. Second, after the angel delivered God's message, Joseph portrayed Abraham's type of righteousness...Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

The story of the Magi, chapter 2, has been explained endlessly, so it may be hard to see it with 'fresh eyes'. Keep in mind: We don't know how many wise men there were; the star wasn't just a sky event, but pointed to a particular building (heaven reaching to earth); what was the return route?

Verse 4:12 says Jesus went to live in Capernaum. Where? We know He didn't own a house. What was his 'home away from home'?

October 2

Matthew 5-6

Jesus shocks the crowd with the perplexing Beatitudes. His followers are called to be different, to stand out from the crowd. They are to season daily life (salt) and make everything clearer (light).

Their righteousness must exceed that of the elders and Pharisees, to include not only action but also thoughts and motives. Thoughts not centered on God draw us closer to Satan. Along the same lines, God knows already what we'll pray (6:7), so what does God want from us when we pray? Our hearts.

October 3

Matthew 7-9

Chapter 7 continues the Sermon on the Mount. We see this style in several places: Jesus sits on a hill side and listeners gather around below, better able to see and hear.

Jesus speaks of a disciplined lifestyle, focused on God. It's amazing that guiding principles must be like chains. If we don't let ourselves be restricted enough to be guided in the right direction, we can easily fall into the wrong path. We tend to want freedom to make our own choices in our relationship with God, yet we say that God's ways are always best. The solution? Freely choose to follow God as completely as you can.

I long to find that calm of Jesus that allowed Him to sleep in the boat while the storm raged about Him. We tend to toss and turn in our beds when trouble comes like a raging storm. Any little noise that wakes us up sets us to thinking about what might go wrong. We've got to center on the truth that Jesus is 'in the boat' with us, no matter what storm arises.

Verse 9:8 is often overlooked. the crowd praised God when the paralytic was healed, not as much for the healing as for the revelation that a man (Jesus) had been given God's authority to forgive sins. Prisoners to sin could be set free!

Verse 9:13 calls for a change in how a church does business. Aren't we focused on the righteous?

October 4

Matthew 10-11

Jesus sent out His disciples to experience doing ministry beyond His shadow. This would “firm up” their faith and increase their confidence. They were to take no provisions, living off the generosity of those who they ministered to.

Churches are always faced with a similar question: How important, financially, is the spiritual part of life? Is our minister worth what we pay him? Is he worth more? How can anyone answer these questions without prayer?

Verse 11:20 speaks of training oxen for labor in the fields. To teach a new ox how to plow, a farmer pairs it in the same yoke with an experienced animal. The new animal will learn how to labor by working closely with one that knows what to do. We labor with Christ, who has “been there, done that”.

October 5

Matthew 12

The Sabbath is difficult to deal with, and always has been. Is it to be more rest than worship? Can it be just a change of labor, like do yard work instead of our normal occupation? The basic concept is rejuvenation, bringing new life. That's where worship fits in. Jesus also plainly says it is in God's will to do good on the Sabbath, which brings new life to the minister and the one ministered to.

You've got to be amused by the question put forth by the religious leaders, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" Jesus was doing miraculous healings. Nobody else could heal....except God himself. Now, were they going to make God follow their idea of what was right? Here we see the problem with religion in that day: The religious leaders were making disciples to themselves and the system, rather than to God.

October 6

Matthew 13-14

Now Jesus sits in a boat to speak. As when He taught from high on a hill, the object is for more people to be able to hear His words. When you can "read" a person's lips as they speak, you can hear them better!

Jesus speaks in parables, stories that metaphorically explain spiritually truths. He wants people to understand. Jesus flatters the disciples, suggesting they'd understand all these things without resorting to parables...but I think they needed the stories as much as everyone else.

Later in Matthew, the parables often contain thinly-veiled criticism of the religious leaders of that day. We don't see that here.

In the feeding of the 5000, it has always amazed me that the leftovers exceeded the original amount. How could this be? How could Jesus make something out of nothing? Still, I ask for the same kind of thing each day when I pray. I ask for healing that seems medically impossible. I ask for peace in the middle of chaos. I ask for God to meet my needs beyond what I can do for myself. God is in the business of creating something from nothing.

October 7

Matthew 15-17

Why in the world would Pharisees walk all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to ask Jesus why His disciples didn't wash their hands (15:2)? The writer is emphasizing how important the religious rules of men are to the Pharisees. God passed the Law down to Moses in a much simpler form. Rules that had been intended to keep people close to God had become a substitute for a personal relationship with Him.

Jesus' healings were not just good doctoring . For anyone 'with eyes to see', it was a sign that the very essence of God had made a 'beach head' in the world of humans. God had made personal entry into our world, and nothing would remain as it was.

Verse 16:4 refers to “the sign of Jonah”. This is a reference to Jesus’ death and resurrection. See the comparison? Jonah was thrown off the ship that was heading for Tarshish, was as good as dead, but three days later he reappeared on dry land, healthy and full of life. Jesus, of course, was more than just swallowed – He was dead.

In 17:4, Peter interrupts a very holy and worshipful moment with words that are unnecessary and irrelevant. God Himself, from a cloud, says, “Listen to my Son!” We should be eager to listen and reticent to speak in any worship setting!

October 8

Matthew 18-20

Was pride becoming a problem for the disciples? The start of chapter 18 is all about staying humble, and it is aimed directly at Jesus’ close followers (18:1). What does it mean to say someone is important in such-and-such a church?

By offering forgiveness to others, we raise them up to equality with us. It’s not forgiveness if we keep them even a slight bit beneath us. Jesus reminds us that each and every one of us has been forgiven a huge debt by God.

Think of Jesus’ words about divorce (19:1-12) along with His words about forgiveness in chapter 18. Marriage is a covenant between a man and woman with God in the middle. God expects marriage to be for a lifetime. Still, a divorced person is as eligible for forgiveness as anyone else. When we forgive, we consider the one forgiven as equal to us, not ‘a blemished lamb’. See the connection to the parable in 20:1-16, about the workers who were paid equally?

October 9

Matthew 21-22

Matthew's account of the first Palm Sunday is inconvenient for us, and embarrassing. We think, our Lord must have looked like a fool or a clown, if He came into Jerusalem riding two animals at once (21:7). More likely, Jesus rode one as the other trailed behind. What's most important is the amazing fulfillment of a 550-year old prophecy.

Religious officials were angry (21:15) at Jesus for healing people!!! I wonder how I would react if a guest preacher upended a lot of our sanctuary furniture, then cancelled regular worship to hold a healing service? Would I immediately be overjoyed?

Why did the priests fear the crowds (21:26,46)? I don't think they feared for their lives. I think they feared losing respect and income, which is what they lived for.

In chapter 22's parable of the great feast, Jesus again indicates He is God's own son (22:2), as He did in 21:37. The religious authorities reject this possibility. Their focus now is on getting rid of Jesus, no matter what it takes. Jesus pushes the Pharisees a step further: "Whose son is the Messiah?"

October 10

Matthew 23-24

This is not "gentle Jesus, meek and mild". Jesus really comes down hard on the religious authorities in chapter 23. Hopefully, once they've burned and seethed with anger, they'll look at themselves to decide how much truth there is in Jesus' accusations. This is strong medicine, for a life-threatening disease. Isn't it true that we get very defensive sometimes at truthful accusations?

In the midst of speaking about the distant end times, Jesus adds a sentence to build your life around (24:35): "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Nobody knows when the end of time as we know it, the second coming of Christ, will be, not even Jesus himself! (24:36) Make sure you've secured your belief in Christ.

October 11

Matthew 25-26

Remember that Jesus tells these parables about the end of time to His disciples. Life in heaven can best be prepared for by building your relationship with God while you're still on earth. It's not a matter of getting through to the end, but getting THROUGH the end.

Why were the religious officials resorting to murder? Because they couldn't stop Him any other way. They couldn't trick Him in His speech, for Jesus "knew the hearts of men". They couldn't best Him in a debate about religion, because Jesus had a better understanding of God's ways and intents. They feared the people, so their actions had to be accomplished as secretly as possible.

In 26:63-66, the religious officials are confronted with the truth: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Will they accept it, or commit the unforgivable sin---blaspheming the Holy Spirit? They chose to turn from the truth.

Peter's denials in the courtyard have a different ring to them. For one, he was not confronted by Christ Himself. For another, this wasn't his heart's belief, only an expedient lie to 'retreat to fight another day'.

October 12

Matthew 27-28

Why did Judas betray Jesus? We see in chapter 27 the great remorse he felt. He evidently didn't expect Jesus to be condemned to death. Was Judas just trying to teach Jesus a lesson about how His style wasn't getting things done? Some scholars have guessed that Judas just wanted to make Jesus show His power, and really take charge. IF Judas really believed this would cause Jesus to stand up as God's mighty Messiah for this people,...then maybe that means Judas believed Jesus was who He said He was, and that makes Judas a believer, as in, "See y'all in heaven.". Hmm. Could it be?

Pilate should have seen Jesus as a threat to the peace. If He claimed to be King of the Jews, wouldn't that be treasonous, and indicate a rebellion against Roman authority? Perhaps Pilate had seen this kind of crazy man before, since Jesus wasn't the first to claim to be the Messiah. In any case, Pilate followed his wife's advice, and had nothing to do with Jesus. He ceremonially washed his hands of the matter, and told the people, "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility."

It's hard to know what to make of Matthew's report of dead people coming out of the grave at Jesus' death. If it happened, and Matthew assures us it did, then it was a sign that Jesus' death brought new life! It certainly was a convincing sign to the Roman soldiers who were the guards at the crucifixion (27:54).

Ever wonder why Jesus' mother and brothers didn't come forward to take charge of His burial? We are left to assume that they were afraid to be associated with Him, for fear of suffering a like fate.

The women that visited the tomb on Easter morning were scared when they saw the angel, but at least they didn't pass out, like those BRAVE guards! They were wide awake to hear the message from God.

Matthew's account of what happened when Jesus returned to life isn't exactly like that of the other Gospel writers. Everybody is different! From what we can tell, all of the accounts were written decades after they happened; what you considered most important was probably remembered best.

October 13

Mark 1-3

Since Mark has about half as many chapters as Matthew, we'll find that this is a real 'efficient' Gospel. Everything moves quicker, with less detail. You'll see the word "immediately", or something like that, quite often. Settings change constantly. There are no birth or childhood stories about Jesus in Mark. For this author, the main story starts with John the Baptist.

We can't help but notice the instant fame of Jesus! The people were amazed at the authority of His teaching, but what really brought the crowds was the miraculous healings He performed. The crowds were so large that Jesus had to find empty places out in the country to preach. There was no other way, because *Jesus would not refuse healing to anyone*.

There is a lot packed into verse 2:5, "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" Jesus first forgave the paralyzed man's sins, though I am absolutely sure He would also have healed his infirmity. The lesson for us is that your relationship to God is more important than anything else, even your physical health! Also, Jesus had compassion on the man because of *the faith of his friends*. Nothing is said about the paralyzed man's faith.

I wish Mark had given us more details about the dinner at Levi's house (2:15), but Mark is an 'efficient' Gospel. Were the tax collector guests there at the invitation of Levi, who had just become a disciple? Ooh, that would be a good story! Or were the tax collectors and sinners just taking advantage of 'open house' at a place where Jesus stopped, with no invitation?

Verse 2:22 says that new wine put in old wineskins will cause them to burst during the fermentation process (they've lost their elasticity). Isn't that why *change* is so difficult for some established churches? (And established Christians?) Some churches actually are not able to change to meet the needs of changing times.

Jesus was angry at times at religious authorities. We know that anger, for us, can often lead us to sin, as we lose control of ourselves. Jesus' anger, though, was of a different kind, as explained in 3:5: "He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts,... ". This was more of a deep compassion than wrath.

October 14

Mark 4-5

I have to wonder about the pace of Jesus' presentation of the parables. Did those hearing Him that day have time to ponder what He had just said? These things have to sink in. You and I can pause in our reading, or go back and reread. In fact, when we reread a parable at a later date, we often find deeper meanings. Perhaps 4:10-20 is the pause in Jesus' preaching that day, when the apostles had a chance to ask Jesus on the side what the story meant.

Verses 4:24-25 address this directly. "Pay attention to what you hear, for with the measure you give, it will be measured to you, and more." Don't let these parables just be nice stories to you; give a greater measure of thought than that, to receive greater teaching. "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (4:25) Once you learn from a parable, you'll be able to understand the rest of them better; if you don't take the time to ponder, you probably won't even remember the words of the parable before long.

What kind of faith did Jesus expect from his apostles in 4:40? Were they supposed to know that, even though *Jesus was asleep in their boat*, God would not let it capsize? Were they supposed to 'fear not' because they knew that they could call on Jesus at any time? Were they just supposed to be confident in the knowledge of life after death? I take the middle option, that they should have had the confidence to know they could call on Jesus. Jesus didn't mind being awakened, but their fear bothered Him.

In God's great scheme of things, we aren't always to do what is most comfortable for us (5:18-20). Sometimes our main drive should be to be a witness in spite of passing up personal comfort.

There is some question to why the healed woman was so afraid when Jesus called her out of the crowd. Some think she was afraid to admit that she had been ceremonially unclean (because of her bleeding) and out in the crowd, touching many. I just don't think this would have made her tremble with fear. Rather, I think she was afraid Jesus would take away her healing because she had gone about it wrong.

October 15

Mark 6-7

Jesus teaches about the difference God's Spirit makes in a life. Most every person, no matter how successful they are in their profession, is accepted at home among friends and relatives as "just one of us". However, a person filled with God's power, such as a prophet or Jesus Himself or an apostle sent out by Jesus, is not "just one of us". People find that hard to understand, witness the healings done by the apostles in 6:13: Jesus would have just laid His hand on folks to heal them, but the apostles anointed them with oil, giving people 'that something mysterious' to focus on.

I know that the aside about John the Baptist is going to come into play later. Watch for it! We wonder why all this space given to Herod's relationship to John the Baptist in such an 'efficient Gospel' as Mark's. It will become clearer later.

In 6:47-52, we again find a boat story. This time, Jesus is not in the boat asleep. The apostles are rowing as best they can in a stormy sea, and evidently this

time their faith is such that they are not afraid. Have they learned their lesson? No! They have faith, I guess, that their boat won't capsize, but I wonder what their faith is in, for when Jesus appears they are afraid! "They had not understood about the loaves," that is, the power of Jesus to save in even the most hopeless circumstances.

Jesus declares all foods CLEAN in 7:19. So says Mark. Still, Jesus stuck to kosher foods, as far as we can tell. It's only in Acts 10 that the message gets across to the church that Jesus has loosened the restrictions on clean and unclean foods.

Don't miss the *rest* of the miracle in 7:35. A person who can't hear doesn't speak plainly because they don't know how correctly-formed words are supposed to sound. When Jesus heals this man, he *immediately* speaks plainly!

October 16

Mark 8-9

We've seen this before, the miraculous feeding of a large crowd. The apostles were right in the middle of Jesus' miraculous feeding of 5,000. Now, Jesus lays out the circumstances for his apostles: We've got a large crowd, and we can't send them away without feeding them. *Aren't they supposed to know what should happen next?* Instead, they answer, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

It's a typically human response. We don't seem to remember all God has done for us in the past, and wonder if He is willing and able to help us in our present need. We've just got to train ourselves to trust God. He has always been trustworthy in the past.

It's no surprise, then, that Jesus presented His apostles with a quiz. "Who do people say that I am? And who do YOU say that I am?" Were they getting the point of all His teaching?

I suppose Jesus' invitation to only three apostles to accompany him up the Mount of Transfiguration precipitated their discussion amongst themselves as to who was the greatest apostle. Surely Jesus is showing favorites. When Jesus hears about the discussion, He points out that anyone who seeks to lead must be a servant; the higher the rank, the more service required. Most managers find this to be true! When they were just ordinary laborers, they served their immediate supervisor; when they rise to the level of management, they have to please both their boss and the ones they supervise. Jesus meant more than that, though. In the kingdom of God, you get closer to God by serving others.

October 17

Mark 10-11

I've heard it said that Jesus never spoke on the issue of homosexuality. Doesn't this section address that issue, verses 10:5-9? Yet I never hear it referred to in that regard.

There is also plain talk here about divorce, 10:10-12. It is never God's ideal for a couple to seek divorce, yet, in our flawed and sinful world, it still seems the best option at times. A wife must leave a physically abusive husband. A husband must leave a drug-addicted wife, and get the children out of that situation. Can these marriages be salvaged/ Right or wrong, I've always believed that if one of the partners in the marriage covenant just quits the contract, divorce is often the only recourse. We've all seen second marriages that brought renewed spiritual growth for both parties. We've known persons called by God to be pastors after marrying a second time. I really struggle with this issue!

Jesus' conversation with the rich young man, 10:17-22, reminds us that we often have a 'blind spot' about a particular practice in our lives that is displeasing to God. For this man, it was the love of money. Beyond that one issue, he was blameless. However, Jesus seeks to make us whole, and will bring our 'set aside' issue to the forefront.

Verse 10:52 is a real treasure! Jesus transcends all science and understanding by healing Bartimaeus with only His powerful words. It is beyond the capabilities of the human body God created, to heal itself that fast.

October 18

Mark 12-13

All this should look familiar to you, if you've been reading through the Bible in order. Matthew has these same stories, in an expanded version. Many Bible scholars think Mark was the first of the four Gospels written, rather than Matthew; the theory is that, if you have two versions of the same event, it's more likely that the shorter account was written up first, since later writers are more likely to elaborate on what was first written rather than to leave facts out. None of the Gospels, by the way, were found to appear in written form before thirty years after Jesus' death.

An interesting difference from Matthew in the parable of the tenants is that the servants sent to collect the owner's share of the harvest came one by one. This is more in keeping in how God sent His prophets to call Israel back to righteousness. It would have been more obvious to Jesus' listeners that the parable was directed at them, the religious officials.

Mark emphasizes Jesus' skill at out-arguing those who came to catch a misstatement in his speech. It seemed like another miracle to the bystanders, that Jesus could so readily put the 'big shots' in their place.

Christians have wondered over the past 2000 years about verses 13:30 and 13:32. Jesus first says that some of the present generation will still be alive at His second coming. Then He says that only the Father knows the date for sure. It seems that we're on the edge, that Jesus could return any time, that He is just waiting for God to say, "It's time!" Remember 13:37, "What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

October 19

Mark 14-16

Imagine a major religious figure like Jesus having a meal at the home of Simon the Leper ! He was not a leper any more, it seems clear. Why not? Perhaps he was one of the many that Jesus healed. Whenever Jesus is visiting a private home, it seems like a public event; strangers seem to freely come and go. (I suspect that is still true!)

Peter adamantly claimed he would never disown Jesus, who was like closest friend and family to him. Why does anyone ever disown or deny one that close? It's usually a matter of self-preservation, one of our strongest inborn traits. We *need* that 'will to live'! Yet it is almost exactly opposed to Jesus' statement, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever would lose his life for my sake will find it." As Christians, our minds are gradually transformed from a self-preservation instinct to a total reliance on God.

The chief priests and elders manipulated the crowd, working all the angles to save their positions and their necks. They saved their lives, but lost *eternal* life.

The oldest copies of Mark end at 16:8. Slightly later manuscripts have a short ending or 16:9-20. Did Mark add the ending later, or did someone else add it?

October 20

Luke 1

Luke's Gospel is the most enjoyable to read. He has a real knack for telling stories. He doesn't claim to have been an eyewitness of any of Jesus' acts (as he was in parts of his second book, Acts), but carefully garners details from those who were witnesses.

John would be a prophet "in the spirit and power of Elijah". Many of the prophets spoke plainly to the people, but they wouldn't listen; people made changes in their lives when Elijah spoke!

Zechariah prayed for years for a child, but couldn't believe that it could actually happen. WHAT KIND OF PRAYER IS THAT?

I wonder what Mary had been praying for.

After Mary's encounter with the angel, her visit to Elizabeth would give some confirmation--- if Elizabeth was pregnant, maybe this all was true. Actually, Mary got more than she bargained for. God gave Elizabeth words of prophecy about Mary's child.

October 21

Luke 2-3

You would think a census would count people in the place they presently resided. The Jews, however, considered their homeland to be where the tribe from which they descended had originally been given land. Joseph was a descendant of Judah, so he went to be counted in that territory.

Why were the shepherds afraid of the angels? It was more of a 'paralyzing respect,' I think, kind of like turning around and finding yourself face-to-face with former president Jimmy Carter. The angels said, "Be not afraid," meaning, "Get over it. I've got big news, I need you to hear it."

Simeon came from Jerusalem into the temple, led by the Holy Spirit to that location, to prophesy about Jesus. Anna, in contrast, was in the temple all the time; she confirmed what Simeon said about the baby, a second witness to the truth.

John the Baptist spoke like a prophet, the first real prophet the country had heard in several centuries. In the old days, the country had great respect for a prophet; they could say nearly anything no matter how harsh, and people would listen. Times had changed though; John is locked up when he speaks too strongly against Herod.

Jesus started His ministry at 30. At age 12 (2:41-52), He was already amazing everyone with His understanding of scripture. In the intervening 18 years, he was growing "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

October 22

Luke 4-5

When Jesus quotes the scripture from Isaiah in his hometown synagogue and says, "Today this has been fulfilled in your hearing," it seems everyone is proud of him. 'Our hometown boy is called to preach.' But when He reminds them that no prophet has been accepted in his hometown, and compares Himself to Elijah and Elisha, they take affront. They don't want to be compared to their infamous ancestors who mistreated and killed the prophets! Yet that is exactly what will happen to Jesus. We don't hear anything about Him paying Nazareth another visit.

Imagine how worship in Capernaum's synagogue changed after the evil spirit was cast out of that regular attendee! And after Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law of a fever, it sparked a frenzy---any sick or demon-possessed person in the area was brought to Jesus that evening, and He healed every one. Instant fame! Suddenly there was hope for those held prisoner to disease.

What was Simon proposing when he said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man"? sounds like Isaiah, in Isaiah 6:5. He not only feared for his life, in the presence of holiness, but felt like filthy rags thrown on the floor of a freshly cleaned house. *He* was ruining a beautiful scene.

Did Jesus make himself ceremonially unclean when He touched the leper in 5:13? Maybe not, for now the man was not a leper anymore. The rules never considered something like this!

Pharisees and lawyers started following Jesus around, to judge His ministry. Was there an accrediting board that must give approval for prophet/healers? If so, it should have been made up of religious leaders *who had healed people themselves!*

Wait! Could it be? It looks like, perhaps, the paralytic was already healed, the instant Jesus forgave his sins! He just didn't realize it until Jesus commanded him to get up and go home.

October 23

Luke 6-7

God commanded us to rest on the Sabbath, right? Well, that's true. God rested, consecrated the day (proclaimed it holy), told us not to work and to keep the day holy. Keeping it holy and resting go together. Replace work with worship (not sleep) for regenerating body and soul.

Luke's writing of the Beatitudes (6:20-26) somehow makes it clear that the poor, hungry, weeping, etc. are more focused on God. This Gospel has a heart for the least, the last, and the lost.

Verses 6:27-36 discuss loving your enemies. Why? First, you break the cycle of 'getting even', and verse 31 says that's what you would want others to do for you. Second, you show your enemies an important aspect of God---undeserved mercy.

Verses 7:16-17 include a surprising reaction to Jesus' bringing back to life the young man in Nain. They praised God! They didn't idolize Jesus, but praised God. That's how it's supposed to work!

Jesus said the present generation didn't understand selfless giving. When they did good, they expected good to be repaid. Selfless giving depends on God to repay, and produces a different 'payback', or "children" (7:35).

October 24

Luke 8-9

Luke gives us a little insight into Jesus' traveling companions. We've seen hints in the previous Gospels that it was more than just the 12 apostles. (Luke makes a distinction between "apostles", who were the 12 hand-picked men that formed the inner circle, and "disciples".) Other disciples that followed Jesus included women of means; by the time we get to Jesus' ascension in Acts 1, there are about 120 persons that are regular followers of Jesus.

While the crowd was large (8:4), Jesus tells the parable of the sower, seen here as a gentle challenge: Of the four kinds of soil, choose to be the good soil that accepted the seed and produced abundant fruit.

In the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Jesus causes great fear in the people. They recognize His great power to bring miraculous change in human lives. He has changed the fortune of the demoniac from lost to useful. He has also caused economic upheaval for at least one pig farmer in the process. They beg Jesus to leave them (and He does), not sure they can stand this brand of salvation. A society that considers a human life worth far less than 200 pigs is in a lot of trouble!

In the healing of Jairus' daughter, we know for sure that the girl is dead. There is no doubt. Yet Jesus tells people that she is only sleeping, and He brings her back to life. This is a sign for us, that no person is beyond the power of Jesus to bring them back to life when they are dead in sin.

In chapter 9, we see Jesus giving the Twelve power to heal and authority in their preaching. They immediately feel free to give Jesus advice on how to conduct His ministry: When 5,000 gather to listen to Jesus teach, the apostles come to a decision about when the service should end, and urge Jesus to send the crowd home. Jesus makes it plain that hunger for bread should not 'outvote' hunger for spiritual food.

The Samaritans (9:51-56) would not accept Jesus because He was heading for Jerusalem. They had a long-running dispute with the Jews about Jerusalem, and had set up Mount Gerazim as their 'high holy place'. Obviously, Jesus was siding with the Jews.

October 25

Luke 10-11

Jesus sent out 36 pairs of workers, preparing the towns to which Jesus would come. Isn't this the same function that John the Baptist had? The difference is probably in the style, and the delivery, AND THE HEART. John had been prepared his whole previous 30 years to announce the coming Messiah; his message had more understanding.

Luke's stories are very familiar to us, because he tells them well, and preachers love to preach them. Still, every time we read them, there is something new that we notice. Remember, the Bible is God's *living* Word; God interacts with you as you read. In the story of the Good Samaritan, the priest and Levite know that if they touch a dead person, they are "unclean," and not allowed to enter worship for *seven days*. They walked by on the other side, because if someone saw them kneeling at the body, it might be said that they touched it. It's like you and I driving by a car that's driven in a ditch, hurriedly on our way to a church meeting. (The ambulance has probably already come by now!) Though the Samaritan is despised throughout Jewish territory, it seems the innkeeper has no misgivings about accepting his money. It's ironic that the priest and Levite weren't neighbors to the hurt man, so they weren't guilty of not loving their neighbor. Jesus says, though, to choose to be a neighbor.

In Jesus' teaching on prayer, He says to pray as if God were your only hope, the only one you were choosing to depend on. God always answers our prayers, and is sure to give us the good we need. The greatest gift, available to all who ask, is the presence of the Holy Spirit living in you. By this, Jesus means the gift of salvation! When you accept Jesus' death on the cross as payment for all your sins and make Him Lord of your life, the Spirit of Jesus and God the Father enters your life and will *stay*. The Holy Spirit is one with Jesus and God, and is God's presence in the life of Christians everywhere.

In 11:39-54, Jesus takes time to insult the Pharisees and lawyers, quite soundly. Is this mean-spirited? I'd rather see it as strong medicine, trying to crack their hard facade of 'righteousness'. Hopefully, Jesus got through to some of them and caused them to take a hard look at their lives.

October 26

Luke 12-13

Pretty wise advice at the beginning of chapter 12: Don't say anything in private that would embarrass you if it were to be made known. In our world of the ever-present media, this is more true than ever.

A landowner with an abundant crop asks (12:17), "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." What a great problem to have! The answer Jesus would tell us is, "Give the extra to the poor." *Go and do likewise.*

Jesus is becoming a stumbling block to many. He tells them that He doesn't bring peace, but division. Those who would enter the kingdom of God must go through a narrow gate. His followers won't usually choose the most popular way of life, but it will be the best way, the way of abundant life. Obviously, they will have to leave much of what they've been comfortable with behind.

Jesus again draws criticism for healing on the Sabbath. Evidently, the religious authorities see no problem with the healings if they can be done without work, but Jesus' miracles are so dramatic that they can't be viewed as minor adjustments.

Since setting His face toward Jerusalem and the cross (9:53), Jesus has been calling his followers to a more radical discipleship. The easy first steps are over; to follow Him will be costly.

October 27

Luke 14-16

I'll bet Jesus' comments in 14:9-11 went right over their heads! The ones invited to the feast symbolize Jesus and the Pharisees, with the Pharisees being the ones who exalt themselves. They may have missed the point in 14:12-14, too---Jesus came inviting the humble into the kingdom, not the religious 'club'.

In the story of the prodigal son (15:11-32), we see a familiar situation. A young person longs to add some excitement to his life, and once tried, it becomes an addiction. Will his father accept him back home? Most fathers would. God is better than the best---no matter how we've shamed him and ourselves, he'll be looking for us and will celebrate our return. And even if we've never strayed, God loves us with no limits.

In 16:19-31, we see the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Is it suggesting good works would have gotten the rich man into heaven? No. His earthly attitude is just a picture of his soul's condition. What he needed was to have listened to "Moses and the prophets"--- Scripture! Only then would he be convinced "even if Someone rises from the dead".

October 28

Luke 17-18

You shouldn't expect a reward for doing what God expects of you. It's just your job, what you do. You're called to invite people to belief in Christ; just do it without fanfare. (17:7-10)

The leper that was healed thanked Jesus, but also praised God. It wasn't just politeness; he equated Jesus with God, which was an act of exceptional faith.

Jesus is not telling us that God will only answer our prayers if we nag God! Persistence is an indication of your passion for what you're praying for. You don't ever need to doubt God's willingness to answer your prayers, for great is His love for you. Your heart should be revealed in your prayers! You're talking to one who loves you and that you're in love with, not a corporate CEO.

There is a wide array of things we can choose from to keep something between us and God. It boils down to control: The best thing for us is to let God be completely in control, but most all of us settle for less.

Much of chapter 18 is summed up in the incident with the blind man (18:35-43). He is persistent and puts his complete faith in his prayer to Jesus, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Nothing will shut him up, until his prayer is answered. Then he praises God for what has been done.

October 29

Luke 19-20

Jesus was making Jericho famous again, with the healing of Bartimaeus and the change in Zaccheus. As in Joshua, the walls are tumbling down.

Jesus' parable about the ten talents is different in Luke. Only the servant that doubled his money hears, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The point is the same: God has blessed you so that you will bless others. He adds a threatening note for those who refuse to make Jesus their king: God will raise Him up, and then your punishment will be severe. Is this a word against world religions that believe in God but not Jesus?

The colt Jesus rides down the Mount of Olives has never been ridden before. With all the shouting and closeness of the crowd, the colt does incredibly well. Jesus is Lord over all creation!

In answering the question on taxes (20:21-25), Jesus reminds us that His kingdom is not an alternative earthly government; we are still required to be faithful citizens of our country. It's a different realm.

Family will be different in Heaven. We'll all be part of one huge family. We'll all get along! We'll see and recognize those who've died before us, but those we never knew on earth will be just as precious as those who were wives and husbands, children and ancestors. We'll all be focused on God, far more than family or friends; no relationship will compete with our love for God.

October 30

Luke 21-22

Jesus tells his disciples many things about the end times. How useful will it be to them? He puts it into perspective for them in 21:34-36: When your end comes, be ready to stand before Jesus.

Luke makes it pretty clear that, to him, Jesus is the Passover lamb. Jesus died that we might live, just as the Passover lamb in Exodus was killed to ward off the "angel of death". Luke makes sure that we know this is a Passover meal that Jesus is eating with His disciples.

The disciples haven't really understood, or taken to heart, the times Jesus has told them of his coming death. I know it was hard to think anyone could stop Jesus' ministry. His power to heal, to cast out demons, to foresee future events, has been incredible. He has successfully out-debated the Pharisees and other religious leaders. They dared to believe they were seeing the Son of God! How could anyone take His life?

It's amazing the momentum sin can gain. If we set our heart on an evil deed, it has power to get itself done. Satan is real, and works to defeat all the good in this world. We cannot defeat Satan on our own, but with Christ all things are possible.

October 31

Luke 23-24

Pilate plays a smaller role in Luke's account of the crucifixion. He seems like a weak governor, easily swayed by public opinion. When he asks Jesus plainly if He is the king of the Jews, Jesus answers plainly that, yes, He is; Pilate immediately is ready to release Jesus, as if this proves He is just *crazy*, not a criminal. *Most* of the players in this drama seem weak. This whole scenario was prophesied centuries earlier, and Luke wants us to see that it was inevitable.

Many good novels have been written on the 'bit players' mentioned here, because you can't help but wonder how their momentary encounter with Jesus changed their outlook on life. Whatever happened to Simon of Cyrene, or Barabbas, or the centurion that believed in Jesus because of how he saw Him die?

For that matter, what was there about what the thief on the cross said, that guaranteed him a place in heaven? His simple profession of faith, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom," was like no other. We see that when someone comes to believe in Jesus as Lord, it's not the words that make the difference, but the heart!

The risen Lord first appeared to women, but their word was not believed because, well, *they were women*. In first-century Judea, women were second-class citizens. Jesus also appeared to two that were walking to Emmaus, *though they were not among the Eleven chosen apostles*. Sometime during that day, the risen Christ also appeared to Peter, *the one who had denied Him three times*. Finally, Jesus appeared to all the disciples. Jesus never has believed in working from the top down; you are just as important to Him as anyone else.