

Day One – Recap of Matthew 4:12-25

If you will permit me a short geopolitical digression, let me say that these few verses remind me of Iran. Easy to forget between our rocky nation-building efforts in Iraq and the incessant guerilla warfare in Afghanistan, we would be well served to never overlook the large and rather volatile expanse between the two. I don't know that Matthew 4:12-25 is quite as dangerous as Iran and "imgonnagetajob," but you can see the connection. Sandwiched between the giant of Jesus' temptation on one side and the even greater giant of the Sermon on the Mount on the other, we just might overlook this section in our haste to get on to the good stuff. Don't do it; only a fool would curse the eye of a hurricane because it wasn't exciting enough! You'll wish things were a little calmer when we're in the thick of the Sermon on the Mount, I assure you!

Isn't it interesting that Jesus "withdrew" into Galilee? "Withdrew" looks like a euphemism for "hid," to me. Jesus was constantly mindful of his task and knew that "his time had not yet come," a phrase which is repeated so often in John's Gospel that it's more like a refrain. Things were heating up for those in the "John the Baptist/Jesus" camp around Jerusalem after John's arrest, and Jesus knew he still had much work to do before he could allow himself to be caught.

Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 9 is really interesting. This passage is full of Messianic references, including the famous "For unto us a child is born, to us a child is given" as immortalized by Handel's "Messiah," as well as the names "wonderful," "counselor," "prince of peace," and "mighty God." It's like Isaiah's "Christmas" chapter. If we look at Isaiah 9 in its original context, we can see that it's actually not talking about Jesus at all, but instead about how God would deliver His people after the Assyrians had conquered them. This "way by the sea" probably refers to the road that the captors would have taken home after being freed by the Assyrians. I like this because here Matthew gives a clear picture of how grand and majestic Scripture can be, referring to totally different events 700 years apart with complete accuracy. Well, I say they are totally different, but that's not entirely true. Anytime we see a "little redemption" in the Old Testament (Noah, the Exodus, being freed from the Babylonians and Assyrians), we should make the connection to the "big redemption" of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Apostles sure did!

Jesus sure knew how to draw a crowd. Who wouldn't want to come to hear about how God would deliver His people, and maybe even get healed in the process? Jesus was the most popular guy in Israel, bringing new truth and healing the sick. As we come to find out, however, the crowds eventually dissipate after learning what Jesus really meant. They did stick it out through the Sermon on the Mount, only to see and experience a little bit more of the miraculous when Jesus begins healing again. It wouldn't be long, however, and they would turn away and reject Jesus.

I hope you love the Old Testament. You should.

Are you following Jesus because you believe His message or because you think He'll help you? It's a sobering question.

Day Two – Read 5:1-16

Define *blessed*. Tip: It is not *happy* as we use the word *happy*!

Walk through the Beatitudes. Do these characterize your life?

Looking back over the past year, what has been your greatest blessing, that which has brought you the most true joy and satisfaction?

Why does the natural man have such a perverted view of true blessings? How have you struggled with these issues? What is key to gaining the right perspective of blessings?

Day Three – Read 5:3-12

What does it really mean to be poor in spirit? Is this a negative or positive trait in the eyes of the world? In God's eyes?

In what ways do you fall short of being poor in spirit?

What does it mean to mourn? Who is it that mourns? Read Luke 18:13 and Matt. 9:36.

What are the basic differences between a godly sorrow and a worldly sorrow?

What does it really mean to be meek? What is the world's view of a meek or gentle person?

What blessings does a meek person enjoy now, on this earth?

What does it really mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness?

How hungry are you for the things of God?

What kinds of things do people fill their lives with in place of righteousness? How do these things affect a person's spiritual life?

Day Four – Read Matthew 5:3-12

Complete this statement: To be merciful is to:

How has God shown mercy?

Complete this statement: To be pure in heart is to:

What kinds of things keep you from having a pure heart?

What can you do to continually ensure that your heart is pure?

How would you describe a peacemaker? Is this different from being a “peacekeeper?”

Contrast a peacemaker to a troublemaker.

What does it mean to be persecuted for righteousness sake? Who are the persecuted?

What should the believer's attitude be toward persecution?

How prominent is slander against the church today? How can you and do you respond to such slander?

Day Five – Read Matthew 5:13-16

What things can be said about *salt* that point to what Jesus means in verse 13?

In what ways is your church successfully taking the salt of their witness out into the community?

What can you do personally to better salt and influence your community for Christ?

How can you guard against losing your 'saltiness'?

What does *light* do?

How can you compare these characteristics of light to a believer's life?

Where do you need to reflect your light the most?

What can you do to shine brighter in the dark places of the world?

Day Six

If you are looking to go a little bit deeper in your understanding of the text for this week, try one of these resources:

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getBookSections&cid=1&source=1>

<http://www.evangelibrary.org.uk/members/com/nt/jcr/mt/mat-Index.html>

Sermons Transcripts:

Ligon Duncan - http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/matthew/matthew_vol_1-2/matthew_vol_1-2/index_Matthew_vol_1-2.html

Audio:

John Piper - <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/14/>

S. Lewis Johnson - http://sljinstitute.net/sermons/new%20testament/gospels/matthew/matthew_master.html