

Bible Study Lesson Summary, Feb. 11, 2018

This Sunday, Feb. 11, your readings should be Day 127: Chapters 3-5 of the First Book of Samuel, Psalm 119:145-160, and Chapter 5 of the Gospel of St. Mark, vs. 1-20.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK

Some think Mark was the first Gospel written. Early Church Fathers seemed to think Matthew was the first. It doesn't matter. It's God's word. John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas may be the author. It seems to be geared to teach Gentiles because it explains Jewish customs.

Mk. 1: Mark gets right into the story. John the Baptist is at work preparing the way of the Lord. Jesus comes and is baptized in the Jordan River. He is anointed by the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is lightning, a dove, and the voice: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." John is arrested so now Jesus goes out preaching: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Sounds like Ash Wednesday. Jesus recruits Peter, Andrew, James, and John right away. He is preaching in the synagogue and drives out a demon. He cures Simon's mother-in-law and many others and moves on to cure more. Do you get the feeling Mark is not going to waste papyrus.

Mk. 2: His next healing involves the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is upping the stakes as to who he is. Levi is called and follows Jesus. This eating with sinners worries the Pharisees. Jesus lets them know that is what a spiritual doctor is for. In the question of fasting Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom. The Jews would have known that image. The people of Jerusalem and the people of Israel have been referred to as the bride of God. He then equates Himself with King David. Now they have to think about what all David did.

Mk. 3: The last line of the last chapter was; "That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath. That is not an empty phrase. Think Ezekiel. But this chapter starts to show he is not kidding. It is also another reason that I don't always trust every New American Bible footnote even though I love the translation. Their comment on vs. 28 is that this is for Christian readers. The title of 'Son of Man' would mean nothing to Christian readers. Sabbath they might know from their Jewish neighbors. So I think they missed the point of this clarifying something for the Jewish listeners also.

From vs. 7-12 Jesus is doing miracles but vs. 11 says the unclean spirits would call Him, "Son of God." This would have made the Pharisees very nervous for they wouldn't know if the demons were telling the truth. With all the work ahead he pick his apostles in vs. 13-19. He is now facing opposition in vs. 20-22. His relatives think "He is out of his mind." The scribes said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul." This is the people's reaction to the notion of Him being Son of Man and/or Son of God. Either would be a flag of heresy or insanity if it is not true.

Vs. 23-30 are Jesus' response. He explains the silliness of Satan being against Satan. This would allay the insanity accusation. Vs. 29 ups the stakes on the truth of Him being the Son of God/Man. "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin." I'm guessing that He is setting up the fact that His spirit is the Holy Spirit and not an unclean spirit. The problem is this leaves the reason it is unforgivable up for grabs.

Now the more immediate family shows up in vs. 31. Jesus uses their presence to build a new family based on belief in Him.

Mk. 4: All but the last part of this chapter are parables on “The mystery of the kingdom of God...” (vs. 11) The sower tells us that it grows with our bearing fruit but not all will do this. Some will be lost. The parable of the mustard seed is also about the growth of the kingdom. Vs. 35-41 wakes the apostles up to the reality that He really may be the Son of God. Vs. 41 let us know that they still are not ready to believe; “Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Psalm 119: 33-144: I don't know if you have caught on to the theme of this psalm. It is all about the love of the law. It is a main part of the mid-day prayer for clergy. The church probably thinks that we need to remember that when we have had a hard morning or maybe it is because we might get in trouble during siesta time if we are in Rome or another siesta climate. If you think in terms of Jesus as the primary prayer of these words you hear him wanting to know what the father desires. Vs. 33, “Lord, teach me the way of your laws; I shall observe them with care. Lead me in the path of your commands, for that is my delight.” But it doesn't just worry about not breaking the law but knowing the will of the Father. That involves staying out of trouble and doing what is right. It also involves helping others follow the law and those who are victims of those who break the law. Vs. 53, “Rage seizes me because of the wicked; they forsake your teaching.” Vs. 64 is a key to how Jesus feels about the will of the Father: “The earth, Lord, is filled with your love; teach me your laws.” Vs. 67 is an early mention of His taking on our sins; “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I hold to your promise.” This makes me think that this is a part of his Garden of Gethsemane prayer as He is taking on our sins and realizing the pain they have caused. Vs. 92 could be Jesus holding on to what is right so he does not get pulled down into the filth of sin; “Had your teaching not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.” One more verses that helps to understand this psalm is vs. 105, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.” I think that is already a song. Vs. 121 is important as He gets closer to the end of His prayer in the Garden: “I have fulfilled your just edict; do not abandon me to my oppressors.”

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Jgs. 12: After Jephthah's tremendous sacrifice of his daughter, he has to face more enemies. The Ephraimites now want to fight with him. They wouldn't help him earlier and Jephthah worry about their real intentions. He fights them and checks their accent to make sure whose side they are on. Ibzan had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He died after seven years as a judge. I wonder about his wives.

Jgs. 13: The birth of Samson is like the birth of John the Baptist, a barren woman, and angel, no strong drink, nothing unclean to be eaten. I love vs. 8, “...may the man of God whom you sent, return to us to teach us what to do for the boy who will be born.” They know if God is giving signs that He will expect much from the son, then He will expect the parents to do a good job of preparing him. This is what every parent should be thinking about.

Jgs. 14: Samson seems to be a kind of country bumpkin. He is playful but not very street savvy. He kills a lion with his bare hands, and then he wants to play a riddle game. He ends up giving his wife the answer. That is the power of a woman that men fear. She tells the her family, the bad guys, the answer so they think they are okay but Samson punishes them for cheating. His in-laws, Philistines, obviously live by a different code. They marry off Samson's wife to the best man. This is the constant worry of God as he warns His people not to marry into pagan families.

Jgs. 15: Samson catches 300 foxes and ties every two of them together by their tails and adds a burning torch to each pair so they light everything on fire. Because of his great strength he is able to kill many Philistines. These bad guys seem to have no power over him. This is like Jesus exorcising demons. Samson becomes the judge for the Israelites for 20 years.

Jgs. 16: This chapter starts with Samson visiting a harlot. Then Samson falls for Delilah. Of course she nags him until he reveals the secret of his strength, which means he loses it and is captured and blinded. Like many of the Israelites he lets a pagan wife turn him from the path of the Lord. His hair grows back and he ends up dying along with all the leaders of the Philistines when he pushes down the building on them and himself. God had to find a way of dealing with these Philistines, and Samson was His instrument. He is not perfect or always faithful, but God gives him the strength he needs to do His will. The mock and mistreat and imprison him just like they did to Jesus. Samson does die in God's grace for he sacrifices himself. The Philistines are examples of people who are constantly looking for ways to gain power without have the true God on their side. The god of the Philistines is Dagon who can do nothing against the God of Samson. But realize how Samson's death is the salvation of the Israelites from the Philistines (temporarily).

Jgs. 17: Micah is not a holy person in our perspective but the excuse that is given is "that there is no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best (vs. 6). But he wanted to be legitimate so he hired a Levite priest. In other words, there was no temple or church so they made do. Obviously the Ark of the Covenant was not in focus as the presence of God during this period of Jewish history.

Jgs. 18: The tribe of Dan or the Danites are having a hard time holding their land because of the Philistines. It is mostly barren land in this southern region. So they want to head north. This will lead to one tribe of Israel attacking a family of Israel and ends up taking the Levite who had been working for them. The barbarous attitude of these people should give us an idea that God's law is still not firmly planted.

Jgs. 19: There is still no king in Israel, which includes God. This chapter is a story like the story of Lot. All of these sexually perverted men end up abusing a concubine to death. They were of the tribe of Benjamin, so are not pagans. Thousands are killed because of this incident. Following the commandments would have saved these Israelites. For me this answers a question I was asked recently. Were the Ten Commandments really from God or was Moses just a really smart guy. I have a hard time believing the smartest one of this group would be wise enough to come up with the commandments and the other laws that came with them.

Jgs. 20: Some of the men of the tribe of Benjamin had done evil and raped and killed the concubine. The other tribes of Israel were called to provide justice. There was no other way of making this happen since there was no king. The tribe of Benjamin is like Judas in going against God and not being willing to repent but even though it seems that they are winning they still end up losing. Judas probably thought he was going to be the hero but he lost.

Jgs. 21: This whole battle with the tribe of Benjamin has created many problems that must be fixed. (Judas had to be replaced by Matthias.) These guys did not come up with a simple answer, but the reality is expressed in the last verse of the Book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

I love this story. The book of Judges is a macro look at the God working with the People of God and can seem very impersonal, people getting killed like God doesn't care about individuals. This is a micro look at a few individuals and how God works with them through His law and the community, and later the church, He builds. It shows that when good people live out the law, good things happen. So it seems a little idealistic, but to most people the idea of heaven is idealistic. This is a great balance after reading the last half of the Book of Judges.

Ruth 1: Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, leave Bethlehem and go to live in Moabite territory. Their sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Elimelech and his sons die leaving three women without legal standing in this land. It is dangerous for them, especially for Naomi, who is the foreigner. She heads back to Bethlehem. Orpah decides to stay with her people. Ruth risks everything to go with what is left of her new family, Naomi. Vs. 11, “Have I other sons in my womb who may become your husbands?” This and the other lines around it help us understand that they must be desperate to be connected with any man so they can have the protection of the law.

Ruth 2: Living in poverty, Ruth and Naomi must become a part of the Middle East welfare system. Landowners are to leave small amount of their crops in the field for the poor to come and harvest. This gives the poor the dignity of work and allows them to have a little to eat. Ruth does this in Naomi's relative's fields. Boaz the relative sees her doing this for Naomi, who is too old to harvest, and is impressed for Ruth could have stayed in Moab and lived with her father and brothers and be protected. Vs. 22, “‘You would do well, my dear,’ Naomi rejoined, ‘to go out with his servants; for in someone else's field you might be insulted.’” Insulted means raped or abused. Remember, the law does not protect her for she has no right since she is not connected to a man.

Ruth 3: Vs. 9, “He asked, ‘Who are you?’ And she replied, ‘I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your cloak over me, for you are my next of kin.’” She is related to Boaz through marriage. Because of the way the Promised Land is divided out between the tribes of Israel, they are encouraged to marry their own relatives. They did not have the regulations we have about marrying close cousins or siblings. For the sake of keeping the land in the family they must try to marry someone close and bring up offspring to work the land when the elders can't. That was their version of Social Security or retirement plan.

Ruth 4: Because of her compassion and faithfulness to God's people God blesses Ruth. Vs. 21, “Salmon was the father of Boaz, Boaz was the father of Obed, Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of David.” So Ruth could have been the great grandmother of King David. This was copied right into the genealogy of Jesus in the Matthew chapter 1. Family stories like this help to build character.

The First Book of Samuel

The time of the Judges is over and the people want a king. It seems that God has been hesitant to supply one for He wants to be the king. First He worked on making them a family (Adam & Eve), then a tribe (Abraham), then a nation (Moses & Joshua leading to the Holy Land). But it was always the idea that He was to be the head of the family, but now it has grown and he has to show them how to be a kingdom on earth so they will understand the Kingdom of Heaven.

1Sm. 1: Think of Hannah as the people of Israel. Peninnah would be the Gentile nations. Hannah was childless but was a favorite of her husband. The Israelites were blessed but they didn't have what they needed for salvation for the future, a leader for this nation, hopefully a priest, prophet and king, or a savior. The gentiles seemed to be in better shape. In answer to prayer, salvation comes but must be offered back to God. So Chapter 1 is a summary of the plan of salvation for the chosen people. By the way weaning them was after the age of three.

1Sm. 2: The prayer of Hannah to thank God is very much like the Magnificat. Just a side note, (vs. 8) "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he has settled world upon them." This fits the image of creation that is pictured in the Genesis in some of your bibles. The sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, are the images of the chief priests that Jesus would have to contend with. Vs. 27-36 is a prophecy on the end of the priesthood based on the family tree of Levi, but God will choose one priest who is faithful (vs. 35). That is a prophecy of Jesus and the end of Jewish priests. There are no more Jewish priests, only Rabbis.