

Bible Study Lesson Summary, Feb. 4, 2018

This Sunday, Feb. 4, your readings should be Day 120: Chapters 23-24 of Judith, Psalm 119:33-48, and Chapter 1 of the Gospel of St. Mark, vs. 1-28.

ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

Gal. 5: Paul continues to outline the difference between being baptized and being a part of the family and being circumcised which makes you a slave to the law. He is once again blunt as he makes a suggestion about those who are insisting on circumcision; "Would that those who are upsetting you might also castrate themselves!" (vs. 12) Starting with vs. 13 he shows what the freedom is for. It is not to have sexual freedom but rather an opportunity to serve one another through love. This is a great message for those who are married. It is a freedom to give all your love to a particular person, not just a license for sex. Starting in vs. 16 he really lays it on the line about those who won't get to be in heaven and those that will.

Gal. 6: In here he is outlining that we can't be the judge, only God. We must correct in a gentle spirit and bear one another's burdens; never grow tired of doing good. Vs. 17 is interesting; "From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body." Is this scars from being stoned or the stigmata?

THE LETTER OF ST. JAMES

There is no agreement on which St. James wrote this letter. Some say it was St. James the Less or the Apostle that wasn't the brother of St. John. Others think it was another James that was in charge of the Church in Jerusalem for a while. I just worry about what it says. I see the letter as halfway between how Paul writes and how the book of wisdom is written. Either way it is straight forward and blunt. You also need to know that this Letter of St. James was one that Martin Luther really wanted out of the Bible because it doesn't fit his "Sola fide" motto. James is obviously clarifying that faith alone is not enough for salvation.

James 1: The first thing to note is how James identifies himself in the first verse, "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." He does not see himself as a brother or a son. This will set a tone as to how he identifies the will of God for himself and us. He is not looking at this life as a walk through a rose garden, but testing. (vs.3) If you don't know what the master wants, you better ask him. (vs. 5) Just don't doubt the boss, for there is no other right one. (vs. 6) He levels the playing field in vs. 9-11 for we are all nothing compared to the master. Vs. 12-18 remind us to not think that God is trying to tempt us away from Him. That temptation is from ourselves in our weakness. If you stay with the idea of slave you will realize how he understands that we must do the will of the master and not just hear it.

James 2: Vs. 1-13 goes back to the idea that we are all equal before the master so we must treat each other as equals and not play favorites. He ends that section with the idea that we shouldn't be proud that we didn't break all the commandments. One is enough for us to lose the freedom of a merciful master. Then he gives another take on doing more than hearing or having faith. You have to do the will of the Father. Vs. 20 is emphasis of his point, "Do you want proof, you ignoramus,

that faith without works is useless?” He gives examples of Abraham and Rahab had to actually do something for them to be saved.

James 3: Vs. 1-12 are a very pointed clarification of the power our tongues have to do evil or good. Notice that in the rest of the chapter he is not putting down ambition, but selfish ambition and jealousy. Think in terms of the difference between a slave that wants to be his best for his master and a slave that his trying to make other slaves look bad by showing off.

James 4: He then links this bad attitude towards others as evil because it causes divisions between us and other slaves or servants of the Lord. He is not saying we shouldn't have a division between good and bad. He already clarified that. He wants Christian unity. Sin or allowing sin can create that. Think King Henry VIII. Vs. 11-12 are making sure that we know that God is the judge and not us. Vs. 13-17 explain that boasting is evil, especially false bragging. Again we are expected to make the connection that this behavior will harm other workers and not help the master's plan. Just realize that anything we accomplish is because the Lord made it possible for us to do it.

James 5: At the end of vs. 3 he says “You have stored up treasure for the last days.” That is different than storing up treasure in heaven. What ill-gotten wealth we have stored for our retirement on earth will not provide a good retirement in heaven. Vs. 7-12 are about being faithful slaves. If we think of ourselves as servants of the Lord this makes sense. If we think we are on our own it doesn't. Vs. 13-15 is the basis for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Vs. 16-18 is not necessarily talking about the Sacrament of Reconciliation but could just be meekness, but if you look at it as a part of Jesus telling the Apostles that they have the power to forgives sins, then we have a full picture of Reconciliation. I think vs. 20 is very hopeful; “He should know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” Save a soul and you are saved is not a guarantee but a possibility.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Psalm 114: A song of praise to God for His miracles in the desert, but it makes me wonder if the Father and Son would joke and laugh about creation. They put so many cool things in it, like “the mountains skipped like rams; the hills, like lambs of the flock.”

Psalm 115: This is a prayer praising the greatness of God. In Vs. 5-6 there is a great portrayal of the foolishness of false idols, or our good luck charms; “They have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see. They have noses but do not smell.” Vs. 17-18: “The dead do not praise the Lord, all those gone down into silence. It is we who bless the Lord, both now and forever.” Without Jesus' resurrection and the same for us the prayer of Jesus would be a lie. Picture Jesus praying this as he was dying on the cross.

Psalm 116: Vs. 11, has been quoted to show that Jesus could not be sinless, but if this is a prayer of Jesus, which I believe, then it makes sense. “I said in my alarm, ‘No one can be trusted!’” He makes this statement during His Passion and His panic. Vs. 13, “I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.” And vs. 16, “Lord, I am your servant, your servant, the child of your maid-servant; you have loosed my bonds.” Mary even called herself the maidservant of the Lord to Archangel Gabriel. When we are thinking we are so great we should realize that Jesus

considered Himself a servant of the Father. That is another one of those things from my dad that comes from the bible, for he referred to us as his slave labor.

Psalm 117: The shortest psalm and a prayer of praise.

Psalm 118: According to some protestant preachers Ps.118 is the middle of the Bible if you are just counting words. They make a big deal about how it is also between the shortest and the longest psalms. The problem is that they have cut certain books out of the Bible so it doesn't work with the Catholic Bibles. But this psalm contains a passage that is mentioned in Acts 4:11 and repeated by many early Church Fathers. Vs. 22, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." So the Son may be a servant to the Father but the Father made His Son to be the foundation stone for building the kingdom on earth, the Church.

Psalm 119: 1-32: This one would be more fun if you knew Hebrew. Its twenty-two stanzas are in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. The eight verses that make up each stanza each begin with the same letter. Each verse contains one word for "instruction." My favorite line is in vs. 9, "How can the young walk without fault?" Very few kids can say they like laws. It is only when we get older that we learn to appreciate laws. It is good to know that Jesus understands this.

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

Jos. 23: Key lines in Joshua's closing remarks and state of the nation include: Vs. 7, "You must not invoke their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or worship them, but you must remain loyal to the Lord, your God,..." Vs. 16, "If you transgress the covenant of the Lord, your God, which he enjoined on you, serve other gods and worship them, the anger of the Lord will flare up against you and you will quickly perish from the good land which he has given you." Being a part of the Church is not enough. You have to stay faithful.

Jos. 24: Vs. 13, "I gave you a land which you had not tilled and cities which you had not built, to dwell in; you have eaten of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant." We will receive what we did not earn on our own. Vs. 26, "Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was in the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people, "This stone shall be our witness, for it has heard all the words which the Lord spoke to us. It shall be a witness against you, should you wish to deny your God." The oak is the cross and the stone (rock) is Peter and his authority in the Church. The book ends with Joshua, the type of savior, dying.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The number 12 is so prominent in the Bible. Now we have 12 Judges. Much like the 12 apostles, some are barely known and others have a big impact. But not following them always leads to disaster. By the way, one of the earliest names given to the followers of Christ was "the Church of the Twelve."

Jgs. 1: The Chosen People do what God wants and they win battles. The problem is that all the bad influences of the other cultures remain which will continue to provide temptation for the Israelites. Vs. 5-7: Here we have a Canaanite, King Adonibezek, getting punished by the tribe of Judah. He realizes that he is getting treated just like he had treated his enemies. How you judge

will be how you are judged was the motto of Jesus. What goes around comes around is another version. Remember that these first battles mentioned are in the area of Judea, which is the desert territory of Israel. Jerusalem is arid and south is all desert, the Negeb.

Jgs. 2: Vs. 13, “Because they had thus abandoned him and served Baal and the Ashtaroth, the anger of the Lord flared up against Israel, and he delivered them over to plunderers who despoiled them. Then in vs. 18 we get the theme of the whole book. “Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, he would be with the judge and save them from the power of their enemies as long as the judge lived; it was thus the Lord took pity on their distressful cries of affliction under their oppressors. But when the judge died, they would relapse and do worse than their fathers, following other gods in service and worship, relinquishing none of their evil practices or stubborn conduct.”

Jgs. 3: Vs. 6 shows why God is worried: “In fact, they took their daughters in marriage, and gave their own daughters to their sons in marriage, and served their gods.” God knows that women have tremendous power. Ehud is the second judge and is left-handed. This would be an odd thing for us to mention but for them it was as significant as us mentioning that a tennis player was left-handed. It means that there would be a different strategy needed to defeat him, and since it was so unusual, it gave him an edge.

Jgs. 4: God uses, Deborah, the prophetess, to judge His people. Then He has Jael, wife of Heber, to do the dirty work of driving a tent peg through the bad guy’s head after giving him milk to make him sleepy. The Canaanite general, Sisera, underestimated Jael, because she was a woman.

Jgs. 5: The long song of praise of God and Deborah. Someone must have loved her enough to write this song.

Jgs. 6: Gideon is called to be a leader but he doesn’t want to take anything for granted. An angel isn’t enough, he wants signs. God gives them to him. I have talked to so many people who have been like this. God just about has to knock them on the side of their head to get them to believe. How many signs do each of us get throughout our lives and yet we always want another one. The biggest problem is that I resemble this problem.

Jgs. 7: First God selects a small number to be His warriors. It was only the ones who weren’t afraid and didn’t drink like animals, but drank from their hands. Then God helps Gideon win by having the enemy have nightmares about bread. The footnotes say the bread represents the agricultural Hebrews while the tent that the bread destroys represents the nomad enemies. It’s just a simple foreshadowing of Jesus the Bread of Life to save the people. It is also significant that vs. 22 tells us, “...throughout the camp the Lord set the sword of one against another.” The bad guys attack each other. Good does not attack good, but evil will attack evil just as fast as it attacks good.

Jgs. 8: Gideon does the will of the God and wins battles. When asked to be ruler over the Israelites he wisely responds: “The Lord must rule over you.”(vs. 23) He did this for the Lord had clearly given him the victory. Vs. 27, Gideon requested gold for his reward and made it into a vestment like a chasuble. But he and the Israelites paid adulterous homage to it rather than worshipping the Lord, causing the ruin of Gideon and his family. He has a son, Abimelech, by his concubine.

Jgs. 9: Abimelech does not play nice with his 70 brothers and kills all but one of them, Jotham. Vs. 7-15 gives the great parable of kings who serve themselves. This is God’s reminder that He is to be king. Abimelech is not a nice person and accepts Baal worship, but God works through him. But even though God allows him to win a few battles, Abimelech does not live happily ever after.

Jgs. 10: Two more judges, Toia and Jair serve the Lord but the people don't. But life becomes so unbearable that God challenged them to drive out the foreign gods. Vs. 14, God says: "Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen; let them save you now that you are in distress." Vs. 16, the people finally responded; "And they cast out the foreign gods from their midst and served the Lord, so that he grieved over the misery of Israel."

Jgs. 11: Jephthah is an interesting character. He is born of a harlot and so mocked. Then they want him to be king. Remember that Mary could have been stoned for conceiving Jesus. Then it sounds like Palm Sunday with them wanting him to be king. Jephthah makes a vow and must sacrifice his only child, a daughter. It sounds like God's Covenant that He cannot break, which can only be fulfilled by sacrificing His only begotten child. It is very important to remember the lesson of death does not equal the end or condemnation in God's eyes. So Jephthah's daughter is not lost or condemned but dies honorably and becomes a servant of the Lord.