

## **JANUARY 30**

What's great about doing this reading with other people, like in a discipleship cell, is that you can discuss and hear other observations and try out some of your own and have people tell you that you might have overlooked something. For example, I was talking about this stuff with my wife, who told me that the comment I made about the magicians not being able to "create life" had a problem because they were able to turn their sticks into snakes. I objected because I don't consider snakes a valid life form, just like I don't consider cauliflower a valid food unless you smother it in a cheese sauce, whereas I still wouldn't like snakes even in cheese sauce. Anyway, where was I, oh yeah, she made a good point. Talking this stuff out in a group makes it fun and the Spirit leads you to other insights.

One other thing. This morning I read my German one-year Bible. In the German, the word they use for "fly," means "biting fly." That kind of puts a different curve on the curse of flies. Being a city boy, I automatically think of the common housefly, or in Latin, "buzzio obnoxious." If it was, in fact, a biting fly, that adds, as the Germans would say, a little "music" to that plague.

## **Exodus 10:1-12:13**

### Exodus 10

Vs. 1-20 Note that God does a great job of “coaching” Moses through all of this. He encourages Moses and lets him know what’s going to happen, even up to Pharaoh’s negative reaction. When we read this, it is very “one dimensional.” We don’t feel the emotion or see what was happening. Moses had to have been under tremendous pressure. Imagine walking into the White House or the capital of Tehran and delivering this message. God is being very good to Moses and Aaron in this very pressurized and deadly situation.

Also, this is the second time the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart. That’s 2 out of 8, meaning that Pharaoh is winning in the “who can harden my heart more times” contest.

Egypt is now totally ruined economically. If something like this happened to the USA, it would knock us out of “superpower” standing and the country would be laid waste. What we don’t see, regardless of what country we call home, is that nationally and personally, we owe God a lot more than we think.

Egypt would never return to its former glory or strength, economically or militarily; and, interestingly, in this “superpower” vacuum, Israel would be able to grow, unhindered, as a nation. I guess God knew what He was doing.

Vs. 21-29 Obviously it must have been a supernatural darkness, if lamps wouldn’t work.

God hardens Pharaoh’s heart (3 out of 9) and Pharaoh, rather than being repentant and open, is angry and bitter. This is sort of like getting into a fight and you know you should have stopped but you didn’t and now the other guy has inflicted such damage on you that your pride won’t let you stop even though you know you should.

V. 28 Although Pharaoh and Moses would meet again, it would have nothing to do with the conflict and petition we have seen. To “see his face,” probably meant to petition him to let Israel leave. The next time they see each other, Pharaoh will plead with Moses to leave.

### Exodus 11

Vs. 1-10 Apparently, before Moses left Pharaoh, he warned him of what was to come; and, since Pharaoh wouldn’t listen, Moses left angry with his hardness of heart. When Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, the same thing happened. Jesus asked the Pharisees a question, and they wouldn’t answer. Mark 3:5 says, *And he (Jesus) looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.* Interesting parallel.

### Exodus 12

Vs. 1-13 There is a lot to see here.

First, if you don’t know already, figure out what month this “first month” of their year is on our calendar.

Second, God is laying in place a national/cultural/personal tradition that will prepare them for the coming of the Christ. Talk about long-range planning. Think about the different parts of this preparation that connect to Jesus, salvation, and our redemption.

As disciples, our life and our call to follow Christ into the harvest, to reach out to dying people, begins with our appreciation and love for Him saving us. The Passover is a great picture of all of this.

When I read that they were to eat the meal fully ready to leave, it makes me think of how we, as disciples, are supposed to live on this planet. We are to be ready to work, to help, to share with others, to encourage and make disciples. Down here, we are always in the harvest.

## **Matthew 20:1-28**

The connection of these two stories is in the last sentence from our reading yesterday about the first being last and the last being first. Jesus will now explain what that means. It will have a meaning regarding time, God's grace and purpose, and how a person views himself and his service.

Vs. 1-16 It looks like the time factor and the kindness of the master are at question here. Unfortunately, I probably would have been one of the guys complaining at the end of the story. So, what was the proper mindset?

First, each servant should have appreciation for even getting hired (saved). I find it easy to take my salvation for granted and think that I deserve it. The wonder of Him saving me is something that I should never "get over."

Second, a focus on the harvest. In Germany, we had a yard with two cherry trees. Since it was rainy in Germany, the cherries would get ripe and then you'd have to "mach schnell" to get everything off the trees before the birds ate them or the cherries rotted. They'd rot right before your eyes. Everyone was busy with other things, and I was busy, too; but I remember being out there alone, working as quickly as I could, wishing anyone would help. I think, with an eye on the harvest, we don't care who comes in the last hour and how much they are paid if we have a heart like our Savior, not wanting any to perish.

Vs. 17-19 I don't know if it's just me, but doesn't it seem like Jesus is "coaching" His disciples just like God was "coaching" Moses? He's telling them, again, what is going to happen so that when it happens they can remain strong, not panic too badly, and hold on to their faith.

With regard to the "first and last" teaching, the direction they were going in following Jesus didn't look too glorious. This "vineyard" looked different than the vineyard in the story Jesus told.

Vs. 20-28 I'm not sure of all that was going on in the head of James and John's mother, Salome. (Salome was Jesus' aunt, that is, His mother Mary's sister. This means too, that James and John were Jesus' cousins.) Did she believe Jesus was about to die? Did she think there would be a showdown in Jerusalem, with the boys emerging victorious? We'll have to ask her.

Jesus was related to James and John and maybe they thought they would be given positions of honor because of their connection. Jesus would tell them that those places were only given by the Father, and then, they would be given according to service and suffering.

Vs. 26-27 These words not only helped defuse the anger of the other disciples, but they brought the discussion back to the "first and last" teaching Jesus had given. I'm sure they had as hard a time understanding this as we do. So who really is the "first?" Only God knows. We know that God's goal for us is to be servants of all as we serve in the harvest, uninterested in that position.

There is a lot of amazing stuff here for us as disciples. Are we willing to drink the cup? Are we willing to die as He died for the sake of saving lost people? Are we willing to be the servants of all? Read 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. Let this section sink into you.

V. 28 is worth a million dollars if we could ever internalize it and live it. As disciples of Jesus, we are to do the same thing He did and live the same way He lived in the harvest.

## **Psalm 25:1-15**

I just can't read these psalms of David, without my own heart being pulled at because of some of the terrain the Lord has taken me through. And, I believe, I hope, I'm closer and more useful to the Lord as a result of it.

Vs. 1-3 Notice the call to waiting. Verse 3 is quoted by Paul in Romans 9 and 10. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel.

Vs. 4-5 As we wait on the Lord, we need to learn of Him and understand Him. Understanding God and what is happening on this planet often helps us keep our heads in the midst of difficult circumstances. The best way to learn is to read the Word every day.

Vs. 6-10 David calls upon God to remember His *steadfast love*, and he expresses his desire to be taught and to know the ways of the Lord. David valued friendship with the Lord and He had learned enough to know that God's love was steadfast and faithful.

Vs. 11-15 It is interesting that David had a heart like this, always seeking God. It is what made him a man after God's own heart. In spite of his difficulties, dangers, and sins, David always turned to God and sought Him.

We get the second half of this psalm tomorrow. I wonder what it sounded like as a song.

## **Proverbs 6:6-11**

Ok, grasshopper, look at the ant. (an old "kung-fu" joke)

For me, two thoughts help this "parable" apply to me.

First, this illustration has to do with anything that requires preparation, not simply getting ready for winter.

This could be anything from training for a career to preparing to meet God. The winter part intensifies the need; that is, "if you don't do it now, you'll die later." I often think this is what made the northern Europeans a very organized and serious people. If you didn't prepare, you died. And thanks to that, we have IKEA!

Second, I qualify as this fool. And don't be so smug, you do too. We all do at some point, in some area of our lives. And as if the deadening power of our own sin weren't bad enough, we have Satan telling us to sit back, relax, and not sweat, God is in control, "hey, flip over to that channel," or "hey, go and see what's on YouTube."

Especially in the western world, our lives become overwhelmed with distraction and drifting, personally and in our churches. As disciples, God gives us purpose and focus in Christ and in the harvest, and it rounds out our lives with love and family and meaning. We have Jesus as a model, who came to seek and to save that which is lost. Like David says above, we need to cry out and learn His ways and seek His friendship. And then you have Jesus saying that to follow Him you have to lose your life. But then you receive it back again in Him.

What God is asking us, as disciples, to do here, now, on earth, in the middle of this desperate tragedy, requires focus and work and sacrifice. What we get in return is secondary (although great). But, it is still work. We're yoked to Jesus, but it is still work. But, love gives you wings.

A quote I like from Oswald Sanders' Spiritual Leadership is, "The heights by great men, reached and kept, were not attained by sudden flight, but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night."

Great disciples are great leaders/servants, reaching out and making disciples; because they make and take the time now, to get closer to their Lord, instead of getting lulled to sleep by distraction.