

The Compass

Week 9

OT Readings – Leviticus 20:22-Numbers 3:51

NT Readings – Mark 9:1-12:17

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Lev. 20:22-26. Summary statement of sorts about why God has given them these instructions and regulations.
- Lev. 23 deals with some of the festivals that God's people were to celebrate. These were times set aside to remember God's goodness and to affirm their identity as His people.
- Lev. 25 is based upon the truth that the land belonged to God. (Lev. 25:23) Practically, the Sabbatical year and Jubilee functioned to keep the economy decentralized and to make provision for the poor.
- Lev. 26 lays out the sanctions or consequences for obedience and disobedience, see also Deut. 27-28.

New Testament

- Looking back to 8:27, notice that Jesus predicts His suffering and death three times: 8:27-33, 9:30-32 and 10:32-34. Jesus is preparing His disciple for what is to come.
- Look at the disciple's response in each case to Jesus revelation of His coming death, 8:31-33 (Peter), 9:32-37 and 10:35-46. Not only don't they get it (9:32), they are totally self-focused – arguing over which of them is the greatest!
- 10:17-27. The story of the rich young ruler is significant. He was outwardly "right," we would have welcomed such a fine addition to our church! Jesus invites him to enter the kingdom, but there is only one way to enter – total surrender. What can keep us from entering the kingdom? Anything that we love more than Jesus.¹
- 11:1-18 is stunning. Laying claim to Messianic rule by the way He enters Jerusalem,² Jesus proceeds to the temple and in a jealous rage repudiates the existing religious system. Events are moving quickly to their conclusion.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Mark 10:46-52. I have long loved this story. It becomes more powerful when we consider the context of Jesus soon approaching suffering and death. Jesus eyes and heart are ever on others, not consumed with thoughts of His personal difficulties to come.

Bartimaeus is embarrassing. Once he knows that it is Jesus, he is focused completely; audacious, relentless, no tact, no social skills, no self-respect. All attempts to quiet him, to subdue his passion, are to no avail. He knows Who God is and he pursues Him with abandon.

We see God in Jesus response, Jesus is not put off, offended or annoyed. Rather, simply, "Tell him to come."³ Obviously he is blind, yet Jesus wants to know, "What is it that you want from Me?" Without hesitation Bart lays hold of Jesus' heart and in doing so opens his eyes to see. I love Bartimaeus' response, how else could he respond? "Immediately he followed Him down the road."

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Mark 9:33-37 and 10:35-45. Grasping and jockeying for position and status are not new with the 21st century. Jews in Jesus time were very status conscious, so we see in the disciples. How really upside down is the kingdom of God! Greatness is re-defined for those who would be His followers. Notice that serving and servanthood are not ways to greatness in the kingdom, **they are greatness** in the kingdom.

We don't serve to climb the ladder, rather we serve because we love Him and others. Servants, we willingly and gladly follow in His footsteps. (10:45)

Servanthood is the *modus operandi* of the kingdom, it is how it "works." Until we master our role as a slave,⁴ we will be limited in our ability to make a difference for *this* kingdom. How? Ask God to open your eyes to the opportunities to serve others around you and then do it.

Difficult Question of the Week

Q. Lev. 24:17-22. Wasn't the OT law harsh and cruel?

The "eye for an eye" measures detailed here are called the *lex talionis*. A closer look shows that these measures were not necessarily intended to be literal in every case. Ex. 21:23-30 shows that *compensation* was required for injury, not exacting or literal "eye for eye." The exception was premeditated murder and the penalty was "life for life."

The purpose of the *lex talionis* was to insure that the punishment fit the crime. Other cultures in the ANE had such laws as well. By comparison, theirs were extremely cruel and the upper classes were exempted. The Code of Hammurabi called for the actual cutting off of hands, tongues, noses, breasts and ears. Middle Assyrian law included beatings up to a hundred blows as well as mutilations.⁵

We see God's commitment to transform the world beginning with the reformation of culture via His own people. God's wisdom is displayed in His law and all the surrounding nations could see it. (Deut. 4:5-8)

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¹ How do we know? On what do we spend our time, to what are we committed, what are our priorities? I don't believe that Jesus is repudiating wealth, per se. Rather wealth and stuff represented for this young man that thing he loved with all of his heart and would not relinquish for Jesus. God is God and allows no rivals, nor should He.

² Jesus is quite intentional, riding the donkey into the city alludes back to Zech 9:9. The people respond accordingly and hail Him as king; their cries, the palm branches, etc. are all part of that acknowledgment.

³ I can't help but think that I see a smile on Jesus face. "You believe in Me, don't you? You are not afraid of what anyone thinks, you only care to have my attention. You believe that this is your moment, and it is – be whole."

⁴ The meaning is clear. The Greek here is *doulos*, slave. While servanthood is not becoming a "doormat" to people's selfishness, it is giving ourselves to others for the purpose of revealing God's heart and kingdom.

⁵ Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, 94-95. Copan's chapter 9 is very helpful to address these questions. We must always keep in mind the reality of what the world was like in the ANE. It was cruel, dangerous and unjust. People were oppressed and living in constant fear, uncertainty and ignorance. God's people were truly to be a bright light in a very dark world. (Ex. 19:5-6) If we are not conscious of this context we will have a tendency to read the OT through 21st c. eyes. Remember that we see through centuries of Christian influence and worldview. If you doubt that fact, only take a careful look at those Islamic cultures which function under Sharia law.