

Bible Challenge January 29 – February 4, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

Who are the blessed ones of God? For Micah, they are those who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. For Paul, they are the ones who find wisdom in the weakness of the cross. For Jesus, they are the poor, mourners, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. In baptism we find our blessed identity and calling in this countercultural way of living and serving.

DAY ONE: Micah 6:1-8

With the mountains and the foundations of the earth as the jury, God brings a lawsuit against Israel. God has "wearied" Israel with a long history of saving acts. God does not want or expect lavish sacrifices to attempt to earn divine favor. Rather God empowers the people to do justice, to love loyalty to God, and to walk shrewdly in God's service.

¹Hear what the LORD says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. ²Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. ³"O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! ⁴For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. ⁵O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD." ⁶"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" ⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Adventure Challenge: Micah 6

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read an introduction to Micah.

Option B. Research any name or incident that you do not recognize (Examples: Miriam, Balak, Balaam, or Shittim).

DAY TWO: Psalm 15

The psalmist answers the question, "Who is worthy to be in the presence of the Lord?"

¹LORD, who may dwell in your tabernacle?
Who may abide upon your holy hill?

²Those who lead a blameless life and do what is right,
who speak the truth from their heart;

³they do not slander with the tongue, they do no evil to their friends;
they do not cast discredit upon a neighbor.

⁴In their sight the wicked are rejected,
but they honor those who fear the LORD.
They have sworn upon their health
and do not take back their word.

⁵They do not give their money in hope of gain,
nor do they take bribes against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be overthrown.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 15. (And Psalm 16 for comparison?)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* This psalm is a liturgy for entrance in to the sanctuary; compare it to Psalm 24.

Option B. Compare the standards for entrance into the Lord's presence with the answer given to the same question in the Day One reading (Micah 6:6-8.)

DAY THREE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

According to the world's standards of power and might, the message of the cross seems stupid and offensive. Yet this word reveals the paradoxical way God has chosen to work power and salvation through weakness, rejection, and suffering. Hence the message of the cross becomes true wisdom and power for believers.

¹⁸The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. ²⁶Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Adventure Challenge: 1 Corinthians 1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* If you have not already done so, read an introduction to 1 Corinthians.

Option B. Read slowly through Paul's discussion in this passage; identify where is he being strictly logical and where is he appealing more to his reader's emotions or faith.

DAY FOUR: Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount by naming those who are blessed in the reign of God.

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 5.

Explorer Challenge: The key word in this passage is *blessed*; research the meaning of this word in the Bible, in Greek, or in Hebrew. What do you understand when Jesus says the poor, the meek, and those who mourn (today's hungry, homeless, and refugees) are *blessed*?

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you confound the world's wisdom in giving your kingdom to the lowly and the pure in heart. Give us

such a hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in striving for peace, that in our words and deeds the world may see the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. (*Matt. 5:12*)

Explorer Challenge: Meditate on the requirement to “do justice” but also “love kindness.” How can justice (whose image is often a blind person with a balance scale) include kindness (whose image is often a smiling grandparent)?