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TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

IHOP BIBLE STUDY

Topic: Matthew 24: 1 to 25:46 “The In-breaking of the Spiritual Oasis”

The Gospel of Matthew's message is powerful and relevant to our current human situation. Matthew's purpose is to give us a training manual for teaching the Deeply Satisfied Life. This material is developed for the early church, but is applicable for us today.

Matthew's teaching role model is Jesus. The "Deeply Satisfied Life" is the experience ("Gut Trip Analysis") of the term Sanctification (which is an Old Christian Code Word understood through "Head Trip Analysis").

This is our twenty-third lesson in this series. This lesson still is under the general banner associated with "A Training Manual For Teaching the Transparent Sanctified Life. However, this is the sixth arena, and this is the last lesson related to Matthew's material on "The Teacher's Handbook: Part III– Moral Lessons."

The Spiritual Oasis (formerly, the Secret Garden) is not really all that secret. It is a metaphor for the Kingdom of Heaven. However, what interests us is the experience of the Kingdom rather than an understanding of the Kingdom. This relates to our understanding of the difference between "Head Trip Analysis" and "Gut Trip Analysis."

- I. **Read the assigned reading at one time.**
- II. **This section in Matthew is one of the most difficult parts of the New Testament, along with the Book of Revelation.** Both documents are apocalyptic literature.

Apocalyptic material is associated with the “End of the Age.” This Kind of literature is subject to the use of hidden language. Think for a moment about this illustration:

In Russia, during the Communist times, a strict curfew kept people off of the street at night. One evening, the Bible Study at a neighbor's house was especially long, and a woman was stopped by a night guard and asked why she was out on the streets. She replied, "Well, my *brother died* and I've been to a reading of *his will*."

To the secular guard, the woman was out late because she was visiting with her lawyer. To her Christian friends she was at a Bible study!

The meaning of things all depends upon the context! The significance of things depends on the use of metaphors. Context and significance.

Matthew 24 and 25 are this kind of literature. This section is like all of the apocalyptic material in the Bible: Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, along with a few places in Isaiah (notably, Isaiah 13: 10; 34: 4 as quoted in Matthew 24: 29.)

Before we begin, I want to summarize the apocalyptic section of Matthew in this way. A “Gut Trip Analysis” of this paragraph suggests there are those (False Prophets) promoting a false image of the Spiritual Oasis.

Their image of the Spiritual Oasis is a place reserved for special people who meet some kind of criteria. This is a false notion, because the Spiritual Oasis already is within all of us. Some are awake to it (The Elect) and some are not (those spiritually asleep.) The Elect are not “special people.” They are those who are awake to claim their election to the Spiritual Oasis.

Now think of context and significance:

Matthew 24: 30 raises the question for me, “If you were walking down the street and you ‘saw the Son of Man coming on the clouds in the sky,’ what would you be seeing?” **The expression “Son of Man” comes to us from the Book of Daniel where Daniel has a vision in which the “Son of Man” (vss. 24: 26 – 28) arrives riding on the clouds. Some scholars believe the male image in this phrase was useful to the Early Church to support the notion that Jesus was fully man and fully God. It is interesting to note in Matthew that Jesus uses this image in the same sentence about the visibility of lightening and the image of a dead carcass.**

The concluding image in this paragraph is that of vultures gathering around a carcass. While it appears that Matthew couples both the deception of the viewer (in the desert and/or inner rooms) with what the 2nd Coming can be like, the paragraph context does not support this view. On closer examination, Matthew seems to say that such predictions of the 2nd Coming can be like a dead carcass. The “vultures” are the False Prophets.

The Context: This material comes at the end of our section on The Teacher’s Handbook – Part III: Moral Lessons. And, it comes before the next section on The Transparent Experience of preparing for the crucifixion, death and resurrection stories.

The Significance: For me, the significance of this special material in Matthew is entirely metaphorical. For whatever reason, Matthew chooses to close out his teachings on “Moral Lessons,” and to set the stage for his lessons on Spiritual Transparency, by using the metaphor on the End of the Age.

In our context, the “End of the Age” is the end of living asleep to the experience of living in the Spiritual Oasis. To this end, Jesus uses a metaphor that is recognized by those who ARE AWAKE! See vss. 24: 2—“. . . not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” **The “Gut level experience” of this statement is that those things preventing the Good News of the opening of the Spiritual Oasis are now**

destroyed. Jesus life and ministry demonstrates this truth. The Disciples ask for a sign—Jesus continues to point to himself: I am the sign!

The purpose of all this, Jesus tells us, is in vss. 24:31 is “to gather the Awakened!” Immediately after this statement Jesus follows it with the “lesson of the fig tree” (vss. 24: 2 – 35). Look at the signs of the times to determine if “summer” is near. What is the experience of summer, but a time of refreshment and delight?

The one caveat that is necessary. Tim La Haye gets this material wrong in his series of book on the “Left Behind” series. He treats this material as “scare-the-hell-out-of-em” threats: get right with God or be left behind for eternity.” This interpretation is unfortunate, **because it supports the notion that the Spiritual Oasis (Kingdom of Heaven) is a place instead of a relationship, and that the Spiritual Oasis is reserved for special people instead of a place in which all already live. This is why it is necessary to take a positive view and report the importance of “loving people into the kingdom—the Spiritual Oasis.”**

Matthew records two other dynamics: How to identify False Prophets, and how to tell The Elect.

False Prophets—are those who “appear to betray and deceive.” They convince us that our human situation is our problem and not our relationship to our situations. In a word, they are about convicting us as Victims and not Victors. False Prophets are those who preach the antithesis of At-One-Ment, and their “love grows cold” (vss. 24: 12). Jesus warns us in vss. 24: 28 that the vultures will gather to eat on the carcass of those who are convicted they as Victims. The False Prophets are the doomsayers.

How can we identify who are the False Prophets? The IHOP Bible Study struggled with this at length. Our conclusions were that False Prophets are those whose activities and actions are the antithesis of At-One-Ment, they are the ones who convince us we are victims to our situations and circumstances. While it is true that our circumstances can victimize us, the Awakened are those who have a choice either to be victims or victors.

The Elect—are those who are Awake to the power of living in the Spiritual Oasis. For those living in the Spiritual Oasis “our distress is shortened” (vss. 24: 22), and we are those who “stand firm to the end will be (saved) awakened in the Spiritual Oasis.”

Again, the IHOP Bible Study struggled with this at length. Our conclusions were that the Elect are those who live out of a stance of possibility rather than impossibility. They are the hopeful part of society, and those who work on At-One-Ment in all things.

One further conclusion is that The Elect and the False Prophets are described in the parables recorded in the 25th Chapter of Matthew.

Jesus ends this chapter by forth-telling us the immediacy of this awakening. “I tell you this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (NIV – vss. 24: 32 – 35). **This prediction is confusing to scholars. Elsewhere, Jesus says that he will return before the Temple is destroyed stone-by-stone. This took place in 70 C.E. So, what’s the problem? Did Jesus make it back, and no one recognized him? Perhaps. Certainly, there are those who still anticipate his 2nd Coming. Others understand this anticipating as metaphorical. Others, myself among them, believe this is God’s immanence; i.e., God always is awakening us.**

Watchfulness is required because the Spiritual Oasis is already with us, unless we are blind to it. In vss. 24: 36 to 51, Matthew notes the importance of waking up, just like Noah awakened to the fact he was not a victim to the rain. Instead, he is celebrated as a victor.

- III. Now, to the assignment: Use the material in Matthew 25 to ground the conversation above.
 - 1. vss. 25: 1 – 13: The Parable of the Ten Virgins

What is the Context? The context concerns how to stay awake or go back into spiritual sleep. The Elect are those who work to stay awake. False prophets are those whose purpose it to convince us that we are victims of our circumstances.

What is the Significance? The significance is for those who are Awake (The Elect) to always be prepared through bible study, regular attendance at worship, study, and frequent use of the sacraments, and bear the fruit of their faith in acts of justice and kindness.

What is it that is keeping half of the maidens asleep? They chose to neglect their preparation and the fruit of their decision is that they miss living in the Spiritual Oasis. The caveat is to observe that these women are not being punished. Instead, they are receiving the reward of their deed, or lack of them.

What is their fate? In this instance, the word “fate” is inappropriate. Fate implies we have no choice; i.e., we are fated to be men and not women. In this instance, the women—both those prepared and unprepared—are receiving the fruit of their efforts, or lack of them.

2. vss. 25: 14 – 30: The Parable of the Talents

What is the Context? Again, this parable supports the End of the Age material in Matthew 24. The context is faithfulness, or in “Gut Trip” terminology, surrender of all that you are given.

What is the Significance? Vss. 25: 29, 30 are poignant, “Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance.” In the Spiritual Oasis, the more aware we are, the more we have.

The unfortunate aspect of this parable is that the more Asleep we are, the less we have of the Spiritual Oasis. Also, those who are asleep experience their human situation as “darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In a word, their experience is victimization.

3. vss. 25: 31 – 46: The Parable of the Sheep and Goats?

What is the Context? This is the third parable supporting the “End of the Age” material. One IHOP participant observed that “sheep are led, while goats are driven.” We consider Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the one who sets the example for us to follow, so we must be sheep instead of goats.

The key verse in this section is vss. 25: 34ff. “Come, you who are blessed (Awakened) by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom, (The Spiritual Oasis) prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

Observe two things about this verse. First, the kingdom is our inheritance—we’re a part of the family of those living in the Spiritual Oasis. Second, the Spiritual Oasis is already ours “since the creation of the world.” All we do is to claim it, which means we awaken to it and accept its reality.

What is the Significance? How do we go about claiming it? Ah, this is the easy part. We claim it by serving the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the naked, and those in prison. As we serve these people we are serving Christ! What is the difference between serving and not serving? It is the difference between waking up in the Spiritual Oasis and not waking up in it.

All right, folks. Talk to me!