Weekly Bible Study

This week’s reading assignment: Matthew 8-12

When you read the book of Matthew with the understanding that what’s happening here is all about this thing called “the kingdom of God,” it really begins to come together. We can see that the miracles of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus, the response of the people – it’s all connected. It’s all one unified, magnificent drama. It’s all part of the “good news” about a new kingdom that’s breaking into the world. This is what Jesus taught people at every turn.

Jesus quoted from the Old Testament prophets, who declare that in the last days, when God decides to show up on the scene, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on people and great miracles of healing will occur. For hundreds of years, the people were told to be ready for this, and that when they saw it happening they would know that God was on the move – a new kingdom was coming. A new world order with God himself on the throne; a world where things would be finally set right. This was the great hope.

So what do we see in Matthew? First, Jesus proclaims: “Wake up, turn around, look! God’s kingdom is near!” And then what does he do? As we read in chapters 8-12, he immediately goes around the countryside healing people. Just as the prophets predicted, great miracles of healing and restoration were taking place. This is exactly what people expected would happen when God’s kingdom was about to arrive! The world was about to be changed! Those who had been trampled down were going to be vindicated!

Later in this gospel, we’ll see that the people’s expectations regarding this kingdom got all turned upside down. It didn’t turn out exactly like they thought it would. But...that comes later in the story. For now, the message of these chapters is: “Wake up! It’s happening! Trust it, believe it!” When Jesus encountered people who had this kind of faith, who believed that God really was at work in him – these are the people he healed. Those who were willing to step out in trust were the ones who saw the signs of the kingdom revealed in their lives.

God is looking for the same kind of people today. Are we willing to give up our lives for a kingdom that isn’t yet completely visible? Are we willing to trust our lives to God enough to follow the path that Jesus laid out for us in his life and teaching? Can we turn the other cheek, love our enemies, bless those who curse us? In the world’s way of thinking, this kind of lifestyle is a form of suicide. It will get us nowhere. But Jesus says the opposite. Our life experience tells us that Jesus is wrong. But he’s asking us to trust him more than ourselves. To go in all the way, and see how it turns out in the end.

Can we trust him today? Can we lay down our own way of living and take up Christ’s instead? If the answer is yes, then we will be sent out to shine like a lamp in a dark place. Like his first followers two thousand years ago, we will continue to reveal the radical new kingdom of God in the midst of a hurting world. (See Matthew 10.)