

## Weekly Bible Study group – March 4, 2009

### *This week's reading assignment: Matthew 24-26*

Reflection by Bob Zurinsky, SPU Center for Worship

When we try to read all three of these chapters together, we're presented with a strange mixture of ideas about what the "kingdom of God" really looks like. Let's ponder that strange mixture and see if we can wrap our minds around it.

In Matthew 24-25, Jesus lays out a clear vision that the great "Day of the LORD" is on its way. The day is coming when God arrives on the scene in **power** to judge the world and establish perfect righteousness on the earth. This judgment that Jesus is predicting in the future is exactly what the Jewish people expected would happen at "the end of the age." God *must* come and pronounce judgment on all that is corrupt and evil so that sin and death can be ended forever. Only then will his perfect kingdom be fully present on the earth. The parables that Jesus tells his followers remind them that they must diligently watch and wait for that day. Do not grow tired and dull in your spirits – the Son of Man will return when you least expect it! The wise one will be unashamed on the day of the LORD, ready to receive the king of the universe into this place. On that day, VICTORY BELONGS TO GOD!

But then in Matthew 26, Jesus follows this up with an unexpected twist...he tells them that he's going to *die*. He, Jesus, God himself, the one coming in power and glory. Will be killed. This is not what victory looks like.

When you read this in the context of these chapters, do you see how crazy this is! For two chapters, Jesus is predicting God's absolute victory over all other powers in the universe. And then in the next breath, he says that he's going to die. How do these things fit together? What is the kingdom of God really like – power or weakness? Turns out that our understanding of God's kingdom needs to be pretty nuanced if we ever hope to hold all these things together.

We've already seen that in Matthew 24-25, Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God that is still coming in the future – when God returns and wipes away evil and death and everything else that doesn't fit with his perfect plan for the world. But in chapter 26, he teaches us what it looks like to live as part of God's kingdom here and now. We know that when Jesus comes again, he will come with power and glory. We have an idea about what that kingdom looks like. But God's kingdom on earth doesn't necessarily look like that right now. For now, Jesus shows us that the kingdom looks weak and humble in the world. Like a small mustard seed, or a little yeast. The power and the glory is coming later. For now, followers of Christ are asked to lay down their lives instead of clinging to their lives. This is the paradox of the kingdom. We have to open up our hands and release what we have if we want to gain the whole world. That's why we talk about faith and trust – because this path seems crazy, like the opposite of success.

As Christians we believe that Jesus Christ is the best image of God that we can ever see. We are called to follow him, to do as he did. Throughout his life, and especially in his death, we see Jesus choosing a path of love and humility instead of a path of so-called strength. If we want to know how we're supposed to be living our lives right now, as we wait for God's final kingdom to arrive, we don't need to look anywhere else but to Jesus himself.