

## WEEK 24 DAY 1

Today's Reading: Luke 11:14-23

As one whose group of friends often has a hard time figuring out where to eat lunch after church on Sunday, the biblical call to unity can be intimidating. The definition of unity is "the quality of being one, single or whole." But is unity between believers an expectation God has for all of us?

In Luke 11, a group of people doubted that Jesus' miracles were from God. Whatever their intentions were, their actions in front of others showcased a heart of doubt and a lack of faith in Jesus. As a result, there was a lack of unity among the crowd. Rather than choosing to slander them for doubting His abilities, Jesus saw the bigger picture: "A house divided against itself falls." Notice how the Gospel writer, Luke, wrote very conversationally - as if we are observing events in real time.

God loves the Church; in fact, it's why Jesus lived, died, and rose again! Scripture clearly reveals God's desire to protect, uplift, and guide the Church. Jesus stressed the importance of unity in Luke 11 as a means to prolong the people of God. Rather than calling out specific people directly for their slander and false claims, He decided to instead address the Church at large because unity among believers is essential to God. Therefore, it must be important to us.

A loaf of bread made without flour is hardly bread; a game of catch with only one person is really a sad juggle. While the people of God are a people of many personalities, preferences and gifts, we experience the power of God in action when we are united together in Christ.

1. What are some examples of things that claim to unite us but ultimately cause division?
2. How can you promote unity with other believers different from you in a practical way?

## **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for being powerful enough to unite us despite our differences. Help me link arms with those around me to bring glory to Your name. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.

**Bonus Reading: Philippians 2:1-11**

## WEEK 24 DAY 2

Today's Reading: Matthew 12:22-32

The Gospel of Matthew is authored by one whom some theologians refer to as "Methodical Matthew." In comparing the Gospel account written by Luke versus the one written by Matthew, examples are given that illuminate Matthew's attention to detail. To start, we observe that the man described as "possessed by a demon" was not only mute but also blind. Jesus gave him the ability to speak and the ability to see. Some in the crowd were heard saying, "Could this be the Son of David?" (v. 23).

The people who watched in amazement knew the prophecies. They anticipated the One who would bring restoration. Could Jesus be the one they'd heard about? Could He be the Son of David? Their words displayed a sense of longing and anticipation for One who could bring unity to God's people. However, the Pharisees also knew the teachings of the "One to come." Jesus of Nazareth was not the One they expected, and they made their disapproval known.

The Pharisees knew of Jesus, but personally knowing Jesus is something completely different. To know the heart of Jesus is to know the heart of God. The more we learn and study the story of Jesus, the more we can see a seamless thread from Genesis to Revelation. The theme of the Bible is a theme of redemption. With more than 40 authors living in different times and places, it is the unmistakable power of God that made the Bible one complete story. Just as a house divided against itself will not stand, a people united by anything other than Christ will not stand. To be united in Christ, we must genuinely know Jesus rather than simply know about Him.

1. What would change if we started reading the Word to know God's heart rather than to check off a box?

2. Is reading Scripture vital to unity as believers? Why/why not?

## **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for physically sending Your Son as an example for us. Thank You for allowing us a way to honestly know You and thank You that You know us completely. I pray You unite us as believers in Your name rather than anything we find here on earth. Amen.

**Bonus Reading: Matthew 9:32-34**

## WEEK 24 DAY 3

Today's Reading: Mark 3:20-30

It is estimated that 3.5 million people attend the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade in New York City annually. People camp out for days ahead to catch a glimpse of the balloons, dancers and performers. In verse 20, we learn that crowds were pressing in on Jesus - so much so that He couldn't even find a place to eat. As Jesus' family came to rescue Him and bring Him to a quieter, calmer place, they were stopped by a group of scribes who claimed a demon possessed Jesus Himself. They argued that He was performing the wonders through the power of the demon Beelzebul.

Conflict with Jesus was displayed in both the group of scribes and His family. The religious system chronicled in the Gospel of Mark displays anything but unity. A house divided against itself will fall, and a people divided against themselves will not stand. Jesus warned against division. However, we are not left with only a warning; there is a resolution found in the grace of God. In verse 28, Jesus shared that forgiveness would be given to those who utter blasphemies and create disunity. The same One who was ridiculed and doubted and pressed upon was - and is - the One who offers salvation and forgiveness. Jesus spoke truth in those verses, while at the same time knowing the whole story - even His death and Resurrection! Praise God we were not left in our shame and disbelief; He loved us enough to see us in our mess and continue to pursue us.

1. In what ways are you prone to listen to the lies of the crowd rather than looking to the miracles of Jesus?

2. How can you tune your ears to the truth?

## **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for being a God who sees, knows, and forgives fully. Allow me to see the areas in my life where I have listened to the world rather than Your truth. Amen.

**Bonus Reading: 1 John 1:9**

## WEEK 24 DAY 4

Today's Reading: John 17:20-26

In the past three days, we have examined the Gospel accounts of Luke, Matthew and Mark. While all tell of the same account, they each contain a unique viewpoint. For example, Luke wrote more relationally, meaning he told the story more narratively. On the contrary, Mark was much more a "to the point" type of writer.

While each account offers a unique viewpoint, the Bible is a collection of books with one common theme and message. Matthew, Mark and Luke told the story of Jesus' plea for unity among believers. In John 17:21-26, we read an account of how Jesus prayed specifically for believers. Verse 21 provides an inside look at Jesus' talking directly to God, describing the fellowship between Himself, Jesus, and God, the Father. The intimate relationship between Father and Son needed no other thing to be complete. This is why we can describe God as self-sufficient; unlike us, He needs nothing to be fully glorified! In verse 22, Jesus pleads on behalf of the saints that there is a calling to be "one." However, the way Jesus described oneness was not to imitate each other, dress like each other, or even talk like each other. Jesus described oneness as the result of being "in Him" ... abiding.

The fellowship that comes from a relationship with Christ results in fruit from the Holy Spirit. The more we discover Jesus, the more we will start to resemble Him. As a result, a group of people chasing after the same God results in a people that begin to resemble Him and, simultaneously, each other!

out demons, a miracle is still being done today as we become like our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ!

1. In what ways can you encourage a fellow believer today?

## **PRAYER:**

Father God, thank You for pulling me up from the mud where I lay dead and broken, and for the healing power of Your Son. Help me love others as You have loved me.



## WEEK 24 DAY 5

Today's Reading: Acts 2:42-47

There's something contagious about a group that is like-minded and hungry for the same goal. Whether it be the winning Super Bowl team, the assembly of superheroes that beats the bad guy, or a group of kids that ends up saving the town, we're inclined to root for a people who are united in heart. In the six verses we read today, we learned about the early church and all they did to promote a growing ministry. They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship and the breaking of bread, and as a result, they saw many signs and wonders. However, the real miracle is in verse 44 where it reads, "Now all believers were together and held all things in common." All things? Surely not! For those in the early church, their faith was their life. They sold all their possessions, ate with joy, and added members to the congregation, ultimately giving God glory in all they did. So, how do we give glory to God in all we do today? Rather than creating a lofty to-do list with all good things, we must first analyze the heart behind the "why." In verse 46, their hearts are described as "sincere" to show how this was not an act of works but an act of faith. If we are going to be united in Christ, we must first consider the sincerity of our hearts. Once our hearts are in the right place, we will start to see unity in the Church, and as a result, the Church will grow as described in Acts 2.

1. Take a moment and pause: What are your heart's intentions?
2. In what ways are you tempted to create a to-do list rather than seek the Lord?

## **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for giving us the gift of the Church. I pray that You unite us so that we can be a mighty force for Your kingdom rather than our own. Show us our heart's intentions and align them with Yours.