

## **SOUL SEARCH: Weekly Scripture and Reflections for Teachers**

*Teachers: Try reading these on Sunday mornings before leaving for Sunday school or Saturday night or any time at all. You might even find them useful in the classroom. The readings are not necessarily from the liturgical calendar*

*Try the following routine. Open your Bible and read the day's verses. Sit quietly for a minute, reflecting on the text. Then read the commentary. End with a brief prayer.*

### **Week 1. Jesus tells the parable of the king's ten servants (Luke 19:11-27)**

And because Jesus was nearing Jerusalem, he told a story to correct the impression that the Kingdom of God would begin right away.

"A nobleman living in a certain province was called away to the distant capital of the empire to be crowned king of his province. Before he left he called together ten assistants and gave them each \$2,000 to invest while he was gone. But some of his people hated him and sent him their declaration of independence, stating that they had rebelled and would not acknowledge him as their king.

"Upon his return, he called in the men to whom he had given the money to find out what they had done with it, and what their profits were. 'The first man reported a tremendous gain—ten times as much as the original amount! 'Fine!' the king exclaimed. 'You are a good man. You have been faithful with the little I entrusted to you, and as your reward, you shall be governor of ten cities.' The next man also reported a splendid gain—five times the original amount. 'All right!' his master said, 'You can be governor over five cities.'

"But the third man brought back only the money he had started with. 'I've kept it safe,' he said, 'because

I was afraid you would demand my profits, for you are a hard man to deal with, taking what isn't yours and even confiscating the crops that others plant.' 'You vile and wicked slave,' the king roared. 'Hard, am I? That's exactly how I'll be toward you! If you knew so much about me and how tough I am, then why didn't you deposit the money in the bank so that I could at least get some interest on it?'

"Then turning to the others standing by he ordered, 'Take the money away from him and give it to the man who earned the most.' 'But, sir,' they said, 'he has enough already!' 'Yes,' the king replied, 'but it is always true that those who have, get more, and those who have little, soon lose even that. And now about these enemies of mine who revolted—bring them in and execute them before me.'"

**Until He Comes**—This story showed Jesus' followers what they were to do during the time between Jesus' departure and his second coming. Because we live in that time period, it applies directly to us. We have been given excellent resources to build and

expand God's Kingdom. Jesus expects us to use these talents so that they multiply and the Kingdom grows. He asked each of us to account for what we do with his gifts. While awaiting the coming of the Kingdom of God in glory, we must do Christ's work. Like the king in this story, God has given you gifts to use for the benefit of his Kingdom. Do you want the Kingdom to grow? Do you trust God to govern it fairly? Are you as concerned for others' welfare as you are for your own? Are you willing to use faithfully what he has entrusted to you?

**Week 2. A woman anoints Jesus with perfume (Mark 14:3-9; also in Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-11)**

Meanwhile Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper; during supper a woman came in with a beautiful flask of expensive perfume. Then, breaking the seal, she poured it over his head.

Some of those at the table were indignant among themselves about this "waste," as they called it. "Why, she could have sold that perfume for a fortune and given the money to the poor!" they snarled.

But Jesus said, "Leave her alone; why berate her for doing a good thing? You always have the poor among you, and they badly need your help, and you can aid them whenever you want to; but I won't be here much longer. She has done what she could and has anointed my body ahead of time for burial. And I tell you this in solemn truth, that wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and praised."

**True Worship**—Where Mark says "some," John specifically mentions Judas (John 12:4-5). Judas' indignation over Mary's act of worship was based not on concern for the poor but on greed. Because Judas was the treasurer of Jesus' ministry and had embezzled funds (John 12:6), he no doubt wanted the perfume sold so that the proceeds could be put into his care.

Nard was a fragrant ointment imported from the mountains of India. Thus it was very expensive. The amount Mary used was worth a year's wages. This act and Jesus' response to it do not teach us to ignore the poor so we can spend money extravagantly for Christ. This was a unique act for a specific occasion—an anointing that anticipated Jesus' burial and a public declaration of faith in him as Messiah. Jesus was praising Mary for her unselfish act of worship. The essence of worshiping Christ is to regard him with the utmost love, respect, and devotion, and to be willing to sacrifice to him what is most precious.

**Week 3. Jesus comforts Mary and Martha (John 11:27-36)**

"Yes, Master," she told him. "I believe you are the Messiah, the son of God, the one we have so long awaited." Then she left him and returned to Mary and, calling her aside

from the mourners, told her. "He is here and wants to see you." So Mary went to him at once.

Now Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. When the Jewish leaders who were at the house trying to console Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus' tomb to weep; so they followed her.

When Mary arrived where Jesus was, she fell down at his feet, saying, "Sir, if you had been here, my brother would still be alive." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jewish leaders wailing with her, he was moved with indignation and deeply troubled. "Where is he buried?" he asked them. They told him, "Come and see." Tears came to Jesus' eyes. "They were close friends," the Jewish leaders said. "See how much he loved him."

**Jesus Cares**—Martha is best known for being too busy to sit down and talk with Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). But here we see her as a woman of deep faith. Her statement of faith is exactly the response that Jesus wants from us.

When Jesus saw the weeping and wailing, he too wept openly. Perhaps he empathized with their grief, or perhaps he was troubled at their unbelief. In either case, Jesus showed that he cares enough for us to weep with us in our sorrow. John stresses that we have a God who cares. This portrait contrasts with the popular Greek concept that God had no emotions and no messy involvement with humans. Here we see many of Jesus' emotions—compassion, indignation, sorrow, even frustration. He often expressed deep emotion, and we must never be afraid to reveal our true feelings to him. He understands them, for he experienced them. Be honest, and don't try to hide anything from your Savior. He cares.

#### **Week 4. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11:37-44)**

But some said, "This fellow healed a blind man—why couldn't he keep Lazarus from dying?" And again Jesus was moved with deep anger. Then they came to the tomb. It was a cave with a heavy stone rolled across its door. "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man's sister, said, "By now the smell will be terrible, for he has been dead four days." "But didn't I tell you that you will see a wonderful miracle from God if you believe?" Jesus asked her.

So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. (You always hear me, of course, but I said it because of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.)" Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!"

And Lazarus came—bound up in the gravecloth, his face muffled in a head swath. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!"

**Tragedies into Triumphs**—Tombs at this time were usually caves carved in the limestone rock of a hillside. A tomb was often large enough for people to walk inside.

Several bodies would be placed in one tomb. After burial, a large stone would be rolled across the entrance to the tomb.

Lazarus came back to life, but he would die again physically. Yet, because he believed in Jesus, he would be raised again to eternal life. We know this because Jesus Christ came back to life. All Christians, including those living when Christ returns, will live with Christ forever. Therefore, we need not despair when loved ones die or world events take a tragic turn. God will turn our tragedies to triumphs, our poverty to riches, our pain to glory, and our defeat to victory. All believers throughout history will stand reunited in God's very presence, safe and secure. Comfort and reassure each other with this great hope.