



MATTHEW

FOLLOW THE KING



FAMILY WORSHIP GUIDE :: BY JUSTIN HUTTS



MATTHEW

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FAMILY WORSHIP GUIDE

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OVERVIEW OF MATTHEW

Kings sit on thrones in palaces.

Kings wear royal clothes and crowns, and enjoy the best things the world has to offer.

Kings make laws and command kingdoms.

Kings don't live and work among their people.

The Gospel of Matthew is about a King—a different sort of king. His family tree is traced back to the great king David, but he is born to an unknown young couple. Rather than a palace, he has nowhere to call home. He wears a crown, but it is made of thorns. He commands obedience, a loving obedience that comes from the heart.

Matthew's King doesn't sit on a throne surrounded by a royal court; he spends time with sinners and outcasts. Matthew wants his readers to know one thing above all: Jesus is King. He is the king who guides his people like a shepherd into his kingdom. He forgives them, offers rest to their souls, and promises never to leave them. Though he calls his people to follow him in suffering and the cross, he promises that this is the way to eternal life.

Matthew also shows that Jesus is King through his actions. Storms are silenced by his voice. Evil spirits are cast out with a word. The sick are healed by his touch.

The day is coming when he'll return revealed in all his power and glory—the reigning and ruling, eternal King. Matthew wants his readers to know, follow, and be like the King.

I want to know this King, how about you? Let's discover him together through Matthew.

a servant of the King,

J. Thomas Hutto



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KING'S BIRTH

Genealogy of a King

Matthew 1:1-17

Have you ever gotten to a list of the names in the Bible and thought, “What is the point of all these names?” It is usually then that we skip over the names and move on to more relevant or meaty parts.

You don't have to like it like those ancestry folk that love climbing family trees who are nuts about researching their lineage and heritage for treasure of their past hoping they will find a famous or royal link. Often they find a lot of messes and shady characters.

In the case of Jesus, it is no different. Jesus family tree is a mixture of patriarchs, rejects, kings, and no bodies. Some of them we know a lot about, but others we know very little about. It is a relief to know that even the King of kings had a messy family, but each of them played a part in God's story. The genealogy of Jesus is an interesting study. Don't skip over it.

- ☞ What is your family tree? Why is knowing your family tree important? Are there any branches of your family tree that you'd rather forget or cut off? Why or why not?
- ☞ What do you learn about Jesus family tree? Where does it begin? Why is that important? How is Matthew's genealogy different than Luke's (3:23ff)?
- ☞ Are there any branches of this family tree that surprise you? Which people do you know well? Who would you like to know more about? What do you know about the women in the family tree?
- ☞ What is the meaning of Jesus name? What are the meanings of Jesus titles: Christ,¹ son of David,² and son of Abraham³? Why are these important to understanding the Bible and Jesus?
- ☞ Why didn't God want Jesus' family to be filled with perfect people who were known for doing wonderful things? How does this give you hope for you and your family?

¹ cf. 2:4; 11:2; 16:16; 22:42; 23:10; Mark 8:29; Luke 3:15; [John 1:41; 4:25]

² cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 132:11; Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Luke 1:32, 69; John 7:42; Acts 2:30; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16

³ cf. Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16



What's In a Name?

Matthew 1:18-25

Is there any significance to the name that your parents gave you? What does your name mean? The giving of a name is important. Names or titles give not only a description, but can give a prescription to one's life.

The events surrounding the birth of Jesus were unique and a bit messy. Joseph and Mary were only teenagers and were engaged. Before they were married Mary became pregnant. Joseph knew he wasn't the father of the child, but rather than heaping shame on himself and Mary he decided to divorce her quietly. This was countercultural for their day when young woman like Mary would have been stoned for such a thing.

God had a plan. He had put the baby in Mary. He would protect Mary, the baby and Joseph's reputation. He sent an angel to Joseph to explain the situation. It was all the proof he needed. During the angel's visit, the angel gave the baby a name—Jesus. It is a significant name,⁴ meaning 'to rescue', 'to deliver', or 'to save'. It is a name that will describe and prescribe what he will be and do.

This angel-moment not only changed Joseph's mind, but it would change the course of humanity. This little baby growing in this young woman in this insignificant little town would become the Savior of the world. Jesus would be 'God with us' and God's promised Deliverer.⁵

- 💬 Tell the story about your birth and the events surrounding your birth as you've heard from your parents.
- 💬 What is the meaning of your name? How have you tried to live up to that name?
- 💬 What is the significance of Jesus name? How did his name describe what he would be and do?
- 💬 We also learn that Jesus would be Immanuel. Where did that name come from? What does that name mean?
- 💬 In what ways is Jesus Immanuel, "God with us," in your daily life? In what ways is Jesus Immanuel, "God with us," in your daily life?

⁴ cf. Luke 2:11; Acts 4:12; 5:31; 13:23, 38; [Acts 3:26]

⁵ cf. 2:15, 23; 4:14; 21:4; 26:56; John 19:36; Mark 14:49



What Would You Give to God?

Matthew 2:1-12

The magi that came to Jesus at his birth are some of the most mysterious characters of the Christmas story. There isn't a lot we know about them, even though they are the subjects of Christmas songs and pageants. However, what we do know are the gifts that they brought Jesus.

The magi followed a star from the east. When they arrived in Jerusalem they inquired of king Herod where they would find the newborn baby, which they called 'king of the Jews'?⁶ This news troubled him. It was a threat to his kingdom. Therefore, Herod inquired of all his wisemen to seek to know where 'the Christ' would be born. They shared with him the prophecy of Micah 5:2, which pinned the birthplace to Bethlehem. In the same prophecy it mentioned the child would be 'ruler' and 'shepherd of Israel'.⁷ Herod secretly summoned a search party in the small village to find the baby.

Meanwhile, in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph were rejoicing over the birth of their baby boy. The magi had already arrived and were worshiping him. Herod's crew arrived and had the same response. This was no ordinary baby. This was not ordinary baby shower. This was no ordinary moment. These men met the Messiah.

It is strange that the magi didn't bring any gifts for Herod, but they reserved them for a king more worthy—a new born King. Gold, frankincense and myrrh were some of the most valuable commodities in the ancient world.⁸ Why such a lavish gift? Why such a lavish response? What does one give to God? Is there anything you can give to the One who has everything? These men knew that God in the flesh had come, what they gave above all was their worship.

💬 What gifts are normal to bring to a baby? What made the baby in Bethlehem not normal?

💬 What do you learn about the names of Jesus in this passage? How are they significant?

💬 What hints do the three gifts give about Jesus future?

💬 What king-sized gift can you bring to Jesus? What will you give the One who has everything?⁹ Write a song of praise to the King of kings.

⁶ cf. 27:11, 37; Jer. 23:5; 30:9; Zech. 9:9

⁷ cf. Ezek. 34:23; John 21:15-17; [2 Sam. 5:2; Rev. 7:17]

⁸ Gold was a gift that people in Bible times gave to honor a king. Frankincense was a costly, sweet-smelling gum from a tree that people burned as a gift to worship God. Myrrh was a symbol of bitterness, sorrow, and pain. It was also used to prepare bodies for burial.

⁹ Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 95:2



Power Play

Matthew 2:13-23

King Herod's troubling and pursuit of baby Jesus caused Mary and Joseph to flee from Bethlehem and to go into hiding. The young couple fled with an infant in arms to Egypt. This was no small or easy trip. Yet all of it was orchestrated by God. God was shifting political powers and a young family, preparing the world for Jesus.

Herod's troubling became madness. He decreed a genocide on all the young boys two-years old and younger in Bethlehem. Again, God was fulfilling a prophecy that was spoken through Jeremiah hundreds of years earlier.¹⁰ Herod thought he was powerful enough to stop the plan of God, but it was actually working against him.

It wasn't until after Herod died that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus returned to Israel. They returned to Nazareth, which was Mary's hometown. There they were safe, even from Herod's son who was now ruling in the place of his father. He wasn't any kinder or less power hungry than his father, but again this was all a part of God's plan.

No earthly king is more powerful than God. We cannot stop God. God orchestrates and writes history. He places into power and removes kings from power. He moves people as pawns. He is at work seeing all of time working out his purposes for our good and his glory.

- How do you see God's power in this story? How do you see the power of God at work in history?
- What do you know about the power of God? How does thinking about his power give you a sense of awe, fear, and comfort? Why is it impossible to wreck God's plans?
- What stories are in the Bible when people tried to outsmart God and flex their puny muscles at him?¹¹ What do you learn about God's power and plan from these stories?
- How have you tried to challenge the power of God? What did you learn from this?
- There are a lot of verses of promise and encouragement like Philippians 4:13. What power or strength do we have from God? What do verse like this mean or not mean?

¹⁰ cf. Jeremiah 31:15

¹¹ Check out Genesis 11:1-8; Exodus 5:1-8; Judges 13-16; 1 Kings 18:16-38



KING'S BEGINNING

Brave Forerunner

Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist is an interesting character. You get the idea from the Scripture that he is a scruffy guy that looked like Leonardo DiCaprio in the movie *Relevant*. Likely, he had gooey honey stuck in his beard and locust legs stuck in his teeth. He didn't show a lot of tact either, as he more than once called religious people poisonous snakes. This didn't make him popular. In fact, it made him hated and hunted.

John gets the name Baptist, not because of the church he attended, but because of the job he did. He was a preacher and prophet first, but he also baptized people who repented of their sins in the Jordan river.

John also had another important job. He was a forerunner to Jesus. He prepared the way for Jesus by preaching about the true fruit of repentance and the coming kingdom.¹² It was a message that Jesus would continue and complete.

John's job was a selfless job. He spoke on the behalf of another: Jesus. He knew who Jesus was. He was given special knowledge from God about what Jesus would do and was brave enough to talk about it. He said of Jesus, "He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry." Jesus would baptize too, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit (salvation) and fire (judgment). John warned of future judgment for those who did not listen to Jesus who would come after him.

- Who was John the Baptist? What connection did Jesus have with him growing up?¹³
- How is the meaning of baptism that John did different or similar to baptism as you see it today in the church? Why is this? What is the significance of public baptism?
- How does John's bravery encourage you to be brave? What special knowledge do you have about Jesus? In what ways do you need to be brave in talking about what you know about Jesus?
- Have you repented of your sins? Why is it important to listen to John's words today?

¹² This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (see 40:3).

¹³ cf. Luke 1:5-25, 39-45, 57-66, 67-80; 3:1-22



God Gives Jesus Two Thumbs Up

Matthew 3:13-17

Most people want to make their parents proud. When you get a smile, a pat on the back, a word of encouragement or praise from them it is incredibly affirming. We all want our parents to think well of us.

Up to this point, from Jesus birth to baptism there is no record of any miracles or messages. When Jesus made his way to the Jordan river to be baptized John didn't think himself worthy to baptize Jesus. What is certain is that Jesus wasn't being baptized for repentance of sin as he was already perfect and sinless, but he was being baptized to show how he loved and honored God.

What happened in that moment was extraordinary. As Jesus was being baptized the heavens opened up and the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove. Then God spoke. He said, "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased."¹⁴

Jesus baptism was unique because it was both an inauguration of Jesus ministry and a confirmation by God the Father of his connection to Jesus. God was giving Jesus his two thumbs up. In a sense he was saying, "That's my boy!" It is the divine moment of affirmation when God the Father announces his Son to the world. It was how the good Father took pleasure in his Son.

- How is the Trinity involved in Jesus baptism? Why is this important?
- Throughout Jesus life and ministry how do you see him obeying and honoring the Father?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God? What doesn't it mean?
- Why is love and obedience to God important? How is God pleased when you love and obey him? How is God a good Father?

¹⁴ cf. 17:5; 2 Pet. 1:17; [Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1; Eph. 1:6; Col. 1:13; 1 John 5:9]



Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was weak. He had not eaten in 40 days and was alone in the wilderness. He was vulnerable to attack. Satan was there and was hurling temptation after temptation at Jesus trying lure him into taking the bait. Although he was Jesus he was still human.

Jesus wasn't really in the wilderness alone. He was drawn there by the Holy Spirit. Jesus temptation was intentional at the beginning of his earthly ministry. With each temptation Satan attacked Jesus on different fronts: his satisfaction (v.3), his affirmation (v.6), and his strength (v.8-9).¹⁵ With each temptation Satan used the Scripture, which is a shrewd tactic of Satan. He tries to get as close to the truth as possible twisting it just slightly to catch you off guard. Satan has been around for a long time and knows how to trap humans in his schemes. However, Jesus also had Scripture and he used it as his defense against the attacks.

Scripture is your best defense. The truth is able to pierce any attack because the Spirit of God is at work through the Word of God. Notice Jesus doesn't cooperate with Satan, he conquered him. Jesus stood firm and settled the score with Satan from the very start, "If you mess with me, you got to stand up to the Word." And at the Word of God, Satan scours and flees like a dog with his tail between his legs.

- ☞ Why are we vulnerable to attack when we are tired or alone? How is this a war that never ceases?
- ☞ What were the three temptations Satan gave to Jesus? What is the significance of each temptation? How does Jesus handle each temptation?
- ☞ Is temptation sin? How can you prevent temptation that leads to sin?
- ☞ Why is knowing the Scripture important when defending against Satan's attacks? Why is the Bible such a powerful and all-sufficient book? How has the Scripture aided you when under attack?

Recommended Reading:

Psalm 119

100 Bible Verses Everyone Should Know by Heart, Robert Morgan

Habits of Grace, David Mathis

¹⁵ The temptations hit Jesus physically, emotionally and spiritually.



Light has Dawned

Matthew 4:12-17

A little light in a dark place can bring great comfort and safety. Light dissipates the darkness. Light reveals what is unseen. Light shows the way.

When Jesus heard that John the baptist was arrested and he withdrew to a region where he would begin his ministry. This fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah.¹⁶ The region that Jesus went into by the sea of Galilee was described as a dark place, a land of “people dwelling in darkness” or dwelling in the “shadow of death.” And with Jesus arrival “a light has dawned” and they “have seen a great light.”

Jesus is often referred to as light.¹⁷ He is not just some light, but he is the Creator of light.¹⁸ His light is powerful and piercing even the hidden and dark places of the heart and this is why he calls people to repent. His light is a guiding light that reveals the way from hell to heaven—from darkness to light.¹⁹

The region of Galilee is not the region that needs the light. The world needs the light. Jesus is the Light of the world. **Jesus is the only light that is able to save those in darkness.** Turn to the light and you know the goodness of Jesus.

- Have you ever been in pitch darkness? What is that experience like?
- How is Jesus compared to the light? What importance is this? When did his light dawn upon you?
- What is the meaning of darkness in the Bible? Why is Jesus the only light able to pierce the darkness?
- What is the first message that Jesus began to preach? What does it mean to repent? What is the kingdom of heaven? What does it mean that it has come near?

¹⁶ Isaiah 9:1-2; 42:6-7

¹⁷ John 1:4, 7-9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46; Luke 1:79; 2:32; Mt. 17:2; 1 John 2:8; 2 Cor. 4:6

¹⁸ Genesis 1:3

¹⁹ Darkness is also another term for hell. cf. Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30



Follow Me

Matthew 4:18-22

It isn't unheard of to hear of someone changing their degree or career for something that has better pay, an upgraded retirement package, or has more security.

Jesus must have been a compelling man. Four men who were fishermen tied to their family business left everything after Jesus said only ten words, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Their response was startling. They immediately left their nets and boat and followed Jesus.

What is more interesting is why Jesus would call these four men to follow him.²⁰ They were fishermen. They smelled. They were dirty low rung grunts. Yet Jesus called them. What is even more interesting is what Jesus was calling them to do. He wasn't calling them to a better fishing spot or pulling them away from the nets for a few minutes to chat over a cup-of-coffee at the corner cafe. He was calling them to a career change. He was pulling them away from the only job they knew for good. Being a fisher of men may have sounded like an upgrade until one understands how challenging people can be compared to fish.

These men wouldn't go home at the end of the day or take weekends off. They would walked wherever Jesus went. They would watched him closely. They slept where he slept, ate their meals together, and talked for hours about the Scriptures. This was a high honor. **By spending time with Jesus, these young men would grow to become just like him.**

Peter would one day become the rock of Jesus' church.²¹ John would become Jesus' beloved friend.²² And Andrew would give up his life for the kingdom of God—as did the others.

💬 What does it mean to follow Jesus? What would it have been like for these four men to follow Jesus?

💬 What does it mean for you to follow Jesus? What in your life resembles Jesus and show that you follow him? How do people see your Rabbi in you?

💬 What is your net that prohibits you from following Jesus completely?

²⁰ To follow means to be 'found in the Way.' Jesus was the Way (John 14:6; cf. Mt. 7:13-14; Acts 9:2, 18:25-26)

²¹ Matthew 16:18

²² John 13:23



Good News and Great Crowds

Matthew 4:23-25

What is the biggest crowd you been in? Today people like to measure the size of the crowd at a concert, sporting event, or political march.

Jesus could draw a crowd long before there was Facebook or YouTube. As Jesus began healing diseases, afflictions, pains or demonic oppression, word of mouth spread quickly and soon people began sending their sick friends and family members to Jesus to be healed.²³ And he healed many of them and their lives were changed.

Jesus paired healing with preaching. It goes to say that people are more willing to listen to what you have to say verbally when you touch them physically. His first stop in many towns were the religious centers or synagogues.²⁴ The message he shared was the gospel.²⁵ The gospel is good news. Good news that Jesus is the way to the kingdom of God through himself.

The fame of Jesus grew. The crowds that followed him grew too. Jesus wasn't big into crowds as we will see later on. His message would often drive people away. However, his message offered the greatest miracle—forgiveness of sin. This is not just good news, it's earth shaking world changing news.

- What must it have been like to see Jesus heal so many people or so many types of sicknesses? What would you have gone to Jesus to have healed?
- Did all who were healed believe what Jesus had to say about the gospel? What is the importance of Jesus teaching on the kingdom of God?
- Why do preaching and healing pair so well together? How can you both preach and heal today?
- Who do you need to share the good news with today? Why is this good news worth spreading?

²³ cf. 8:16; 14:35, 36; Mark 1:34; 6:55, 56

²⁴ cf. 9:35; 13:54; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:15; John 18:20

²⁵ cf. 24:14; 13:19; Luke 4:43



KING'S MESSAGES

Blessed are the Underdogs

Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus message was different than many of the teachers of his day or our day. It wasn't the way he spoke or his style, but the content of what he spoke about. We get a glimpse into many of this messages from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

In this first sermon, the Beatitudes,²⁶ Jesus talked about the blessings in store for the least likely people. We often believe that blessings are for the rich, powerful and happy because that's what we see on TV or read in the news, but Jesus turns that notion on its head. Jesus said blessed are the poor in spirit, mourners and meek. That's different. These people don't seem blessed. These are people who have been wounded or are in need because of life's circumstances. These are the underdogs.

Jesus spoke the truth. He was the embodiment of truth. Isn't it amazing that Jesus speaks to these kind of people first. It tells you where his heart is. **Jesus is concerned for the broken and down-trodden.** He is compassionate. He doesn't just pat them on the head and say I am sorry or I wish things were different. He blesses them. He promises good from bad circumstances. He gives hope in the lowest situations.

God blesses those who need Him, and He blesses them by showing up. God knows what you need. He knows when you hurt. He knows when you feel awful for making a bad choice and hurting someone else. He sees your needs, and he loves it when you bring them to him. It's then that you're open to hearing from him.

Jesus gives more promises for the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are insulted for their godly lives. These people choose to be humble, wise, and gentle even though it's difficult. "Blessed" is another way of saying joy. When God blesses he give deep joy, even in the bleakest of days to the greatest underdog.

💬 What does it mean to be blessed? What doesn't it mean to be blessed?

💬 What surprises you about who Jesus blesses? What encourages you about who Jesus blesses? How is Jesus message opposite what you hear from the world? What do you learn about God from the Beatitudes?

💬 How can you bless like Jesus? Who do you need to bless?

💬 How does Jesus give you deep joy in the darkest of situations?

²⁶ Beatitude means supreme blessings.



Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

Those who follow Jesus are unique. When talking to his followers he encouraged them to be different. To stand out from the crowd. To go against the flow. He used to illustrations to promote this.

First, **you are salt**. Salt is an ingredient in almost every recipe from cake to pizza to tacos. It is small and common. Without salt food is bland and can be disgusting. In Jesus, day salt was important not just for enhancing the flavor of food, but preserving it. There was no refrigeration. Meat and things that would spoil would be kept in salt.

Second, **you are light**. Light in the Bible is a good thing.²⁷ Light is necessary to see. Light illuminates what is around it. Have you ever been in the dark countryside and seen a little light from a house or fire in the distance? That light can bring comfort. Jesus said his followers are to be lights that shine brightly for all to see. Lights that reflect the glory of God to a dark world. This light is big and powerful.

What do salt and light have in common? They both cause us to notice something. Salt enhances the other flavors of the food and light help us see what is around us.

When Jesus said that His followers are salt and light he meant that they draw people's attention to God. As salt you help people get a taste of Jesus goodness, kindness, love and grace. As light you help people see Jesus through you. Others will see that you are different and good.

💬 How are salt and light fitting illustrations for a follower of Jesus?

💬 How are salt and light good? How do they enhance what is around it?

💬 In what ways are you salt and light to the world around you?

²⁷ cf. Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15; [John 8:12]



Rules

Matthew 5:17-20

What if you were caught mowing the lawn on a Saturday, and the punishment was being stoned to death? What if you weren't allowed to wear your favorite shirt because it was made of two different kinds of material? Or what if you had to sacrifice a lamb every time you sinned so that God would forgive you?

These were some of the rules the Jewish people had to live under.²⁸ These rules might seem strange or harsh, but each of them had its purpose and good. God gave rules to show his love for us and protect us.

During Jesus day, the religious leaders added even more rules to the rules. Their rules were to help them and others to obey the true rules. They were rules upon rules. If God said that people were not to work on Saturday, the religious leaders said it was illegal to touch a hammer on Saturday.

Jesus didn't come to change the rules or make them insignificant, he came to fulfill the rules and bring freedom from all the burdens of the rules. Jesus obeyed the rules perfectly. No man could match him as everyman has broken the rules. It is a good thing Jesus perfectly obey the rules because he became the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

- Read the 10 Commandments. How are each of these rules good and for your protection? How do God's rules show God's love for you?
- Why is following the rules so difficult? Why do we often make more rules to follow the first rules?
- Why is it important that Jesus obeyed all the rules?

²⁸ see Exodus 31:14; Leviticus 4:35; 19:19



Heart Matters

Matthew 5:21-30

What if you got arrested by the police even if you had angry thoughts towards someone? Everyone would be in jail!

Jesus said that anyone who is angry with his brother is guilty of—the sixth commandment—murder. He goes on to say that one who has sexual thoughts towards a woman is guilty of adultery in his heart. **Jesus gets to the heart of the matter.** Sin starts in the heart. What the hands do the heart has already done.

When it comes to anger towards your brother we are encouraged to reconcile and come to terms quickly so that the issue doesn't linger and prolong the mess worse. Time doesn't heal anger or hurt. So dealing with conflict is not an option.

When it comes to lust we are encouraged consider radical amputation. Jesus doesn't mean for us to literally pluck out an eye or to cut off a limb, but to take drastic measures to ensure that you do not sin because the consequences of sin are much greater: hell fire.²⁹

Jesus is not concerned only about our actions, but he is interested in the condition of our hearts. Jesus knows that the consequences of heart matters are serious and life-threatening if they are not thwarted.

Jesus came to show God's extravagant love in action. His kind of love is so sweet when the world's love is so sour. Yet when the world gets a taste of it they want it.

- 🗣 How is dealing with the matters of the heart both convicting for us and caring from God?
- 🗣 Why is dealing with conflict so important to Jesus?³⁰ Why is fighting against sin so important to Jesus? How important are these to you, really?
- 🗣 Who is God asking you to love more like Jesus? Will you pray for them by name right now?

²⁹ cf. 10:28; 23:15, 33; Luke 12:5; [ver. 22]

³⁰ see Ephesians 4:26-27; Matthew 6:15; Romans 2:24; Hebrews 12:14-15; Galatians 5:19-21



Promises Matter

Matthew 5:31-37

When you were a child you made many promises or pinky swears. Maybe you swore on your Lego collection or by firmly shaking hands that your word was true.

As one grows older the types of promises made were greater and weightier. When you get your drivers license you make a promise to keep the rules of the road and watch out for others. When you get your first job you promise to work hard and be honest. When you marry you make vows with your spouse that you will love them in sickness and health, until death do you part. When you have children you promise to protect and teach them to become responsible God-fearing adults.

When we make a promise God takes note. Promises are important and matter to God. Marriage vows matter. Swearing to God or on your mother's grave matters. **Promises matter because God is truth and he himself does not lie.** When God says something it is true and always true. What God makes a promise he keeps it and you can trust him.

- Why do promises matter? Is there any small promise? What are the consequences of broken promises according to these verses?
- What is the biggest promise you've ever made? What makes that promise weighty?
- Have you ever broken a promise? Have you ever had someone break an important promise with you? What were the consequences of those promises?
- How do you trust God with his promises? Why can you trust God?



Payback

Matthew 5:38-42

Villains in movies usually have one driving motivation: payback. As they say, revenge or retaliation is the dish best serve cold.

Payback usually fails. In fact, it is costly and creates more damage than done before. It is common math. Evil plus evil doesn't equal good. It equals more evil.

Jesus says when someone does something bad to you don't do nothing, yet he doesn't say payback either. In essence Jesus says, "Stop the carnage." By not paying back you are do something radical and very important. You throw water on the fire. You become the bigger person by saying this has got to end and I will end it by not fueling evil with more evil.

A follower of Jesus pays it forward. He helps those who are inflicting evil to wrestle with the shame of their evil actions through their good actions. He lets God judge and payback. If he is abused even more for his good actions he knows it is the cost of saying 'no' to evil and saying 'yes' to going the extra mile.

- When watching Marvel Comic movies how is revenge the motivating force behind villains? How does it reek havoc? How have you seen revenge reek havoc in your own life?
- How does payback only create more evil rather than stop it? How do Christians pay it forward rather than payback?
- How is God the ultimate Judge? In what ways does God payback? Why is it best to allow God to take revenge and not you?
- Is there anyone you need to withhold revenge? Will you pray for them now and allow God to work his way in the situation?



Opposite Love

Matthew 5:43-48

We love what loves us back. It is really hard to love things that repeatedly hurt us or annoys us, particularly people.

Each of us know someone that is hard to love whether it be a bully, abuser, or betrayer. Moreover we know people who annoy us because of their selfishness. These are the very people Jesus asks us to love. Jesus doesn't say love only those who treat you well or say nice things about you. He says love your enemies.

Loving your enemies sounds so opposite. It feels opposite. It rubs against the grain. Naturally we want revenge or recompense against our enemies. Not love.

Why would Jesus demand such love? It is because he demonstrates such love. His life showed this kind of love, even to the end. He would forgive the least likely person right down to those who hung him on the cross.

God is a loving God. He loves unconditionally. He loves sacrificially. He loves unselfishly. He loves differently than the world loves. **God expects his followers to love differently too because we most reflect God when we love like God.**

- Why is God's kind of love often opposite what we see within the world? What kind of requirements do we have for people so that we will love them?
- What does it look like to love your enemy or some hard to love? How can you love someone who has hurt you?
- How is God's love both tough and tender? How can you love like God by hating sin and loving the sinner?



Show Off—Giving

Matthew 6:1-4

Have you ever given a gift that you were really proud of? That you thought deserved a little credit for giving? Maybe you got it for someone you really care about. Maybe you spent a lot of money on it. Maybe it took you a lot of time and trouble to find the gift. And all you got was a thank you, hug or smile and didn't think that was enough.

You are tempted to tell the one you have given the gift to all the details, but you know that will take away from the value of the gift and make it appear like you are showing off by giving so extravagantly. You ask yourself is it really about the receiver or the giver.

This is exactly what Jesus is talking about in this sermonette. God wants you to gift gifts without showing off. Even if the one you are giving to does not see you giving or the trouble you went through to give the gift God does. God sees and knows. He is honored by your gift and you can have more joy he really knows because he also sees your heart.

No one gave more extravagantly than Jesus. He gave his life as a free gift so that sinners could be saved from eternal punishment. He not only gave extravagantly, but also humbly. It says that he did not say a word.

- Have you ever been given a gift when the person shared all the time and trouble they went through to find it? How did that make you feel?
- How does Jesus show us how to give a gift?
- How is the reward from God seeing and knowing greater than any reward you will receive from someone on earth?
- How can you think of giving as giving to God?



Show Me How to Pray

Matthew 6:5-15

Did you know that you can talk to God? Yes, you can. Anytime. Any day. Anywhere. God longs for you to talk to him.

Prayer is an intimate, powerful, and important means to draw near to God. However, like giving,³¹ praying can be a means of showing off. Some people pray in a way to be seen by others. For them praying is less about communicating with God, but more about being seen by people.

When Jesus talks about prayer he shows us how to pray. He teaches a model prayer. What is striking about his prayer is how much it focuses on God. He praises God, acknowledges God's provisions, protection, and power. Jesus shows us the heart of prayer—drawing near to God. What Jesus teaches us is that prayer is less about us and more about God. Prayer focuses our attention on God and in turn grows our affection for him.

Prayer gives you an opportunity to think about God and reflect on who he is. In the processes of praying you see who you are and how much you need God. You also see that prayer opens your eyes to the ways you need to love and forgive others around you.

- 💬 What do you learn about praying from Jesus? What do you learn about how not to pray?
- 💬 How have you been tempted to pray to be seen by others rather than drawing near to God? How have you drawn near to God through prayer?
- 💬 Why is pray both intimate and powerful?

³¹ see Matthew 6:1-4



Show Off—Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting is not just skimping on fries, burgers and milkshakes every now and then. It is giving up a meal or a pleasure for a period of time to draw near to God.

Fasting is a discipline. Not an easy one at that. Often when fasting one may want a little credit for doing the hard thing. However, as we are learning from Matthew chapter 6, Jesus doesn't like show offs. He sees right through the facade into the heart.

Jesus gives the illustration of what not to do when fasting. Don't grumble. Don't scrunch your face like you're really hungry. Don't make a scene. If you do, it shows your heart. And what your heart says is that you'd rather get a reward or sympathy from people, rather than God.

Fasting is an intimate discipline. When fasting you are well acquainted with your loss and need, whether that be food or a pleasure. The lack gives an opportunity to God fill it. And he is more than able to be your bread or joy. He certainly satisfies most fully.

💬 What is fasting? When fasting what does Jesus discourage? Why?

💬 How is fasting about God and aid worship?

💬 How does having a lack when fasting allow God to fill up?



Treasures

Matthew 6:19-24

Have you ever had a favorite shirt that faded or torn in a way that it couldn't be worn anymore? Or have you ever tried to repair something you loved but it was beyond irreparable? **All things new one day become worn or old.** Some things quicker than others.

Jesus says that we aren't to collect treasures on earth because it will rust and ruin or thieves can steal it. No earthly thing lasts forever. After a while it will lose its luster or you can lose it all together. Even if we hoard things on earth we never see a hearse pulling a trailer of treasured belongings to the grave. What we accumulate on earth stays on earth.

Even money that you save or hold as an inheritance isn't secure or sure. Markets crash. The unexpected can drain the funds fast. And after you are dead and gone what happens to your treasures is out of your control.

The only earthly thing that lasts forever is you. You are what God treasures. God treasures people. That is precious and wonderful.

- 💬 Have you ever owned something valuable or valuable to you, but over time it became less valuable? What made it less valuable?
- 💬 Why is it impossible to love God and money? What other secondary masters do people tend to love other than money? Do you have a secondary master?
- 💬 How does the heart reveal what you treasure?



Worries

Matthew 6:25-34

What keeps you up at night? What is your greatest worry? The answer shouldn't be difficult. There are endless worries some of which can be quite weighty.

The most common worries revolve around provisions and care. We worry about how we will make ends meet or we worry about what others think about us. When we worry we take control, but that only adds to the burden.

The thing about worries is that they never benefit. They don't give back or pay off. They only cause more worries. Worries multiply worries.

Jesus reminds us of the main reason why we must not worry: **God is in control and he provides.** He goes on to share two simple examples from nature to show how God provides for birds and blooms. He gives food for the bird and he provides beautiful clothes for the blooms.

How much more then will God care and provide for people? The answer is much more. Jesus goes on to compare birds and blooms to people. There is no comparison. People are far more valuable.

- How does God care and provide for you everyday? List at least 20 things.
- How does dwelling on God's care and provision help remedy worry?
- What worry do you need to release to God? Why is this a burden you do not need to bear?



Judging

Matthew 7:1-6

We live in a day when you can watch a variety of talent shows. Professionals are brought in to judge one's singing voice, dance moves, cooking, or marketability. These judges openly share their remarks to the applause or chagrin of the audience.

We all make judgments. Sometimes from the very first time we meet someone. We judge their looks, intelligence, mannerisms, personality, even their style. Sometimes we pride ourselves on how good we are at judging others.

Judging has to do with the externals. What we can see, hear or taste. However, when it comes to judging we aren't as good at judging the internals. We judge internals based on how we think or feel.

When we judge someone for a wrong doing we need to be open to the same scrutiny towards ourself too. As Jesus said, "Don't judge someone else, unless you're ready to be judged yourself." As you will be seen as a hypocrite.

This doesn't mean there isn't a place for judging, but when you judge you must be humble, careful, and vulnerable. Admit your own wrong and invite yourself to help another who has done wrong.

- Have you ever been wrongly judged? How did you feel or respond?
- When is it okay to judge? In what attitude should you judge?
- How are the illustrations of dogs and pigs historical and cultural to the context Jesus was talking to? What might we compare dogs and pigs to today?
- Who is the best internal judge? Why is it a relief to know this?



Asking God

Matthew 7:7-12

Do you remember a time when you could not find your mother. Maybe you were in the house and she was in the yard. Your voice escalated as you called out, “Mom, mom, MOM!” You went around the house to seek her out saying, “Mom, where are you?” When you reached the door of her bedroom you knocked on the door and said, “Mom, are you in there?”

This is an illustration Jesus uses when talking about prayer. Jesus says that when you come to God the Father in prayer you can always ask from him anything, you can seek him out and find him, and you can knock and expect a response.

Prayer is a great privilege. Through prayer you can come to God anytime, anywhere and with anything. He hears and he promises you will receive good gifts from him. What those good gifts look like might come in a different form or time than you expect, but being a Good Father who loves his children won’t give a snake if you ask for a fish or a bone if you ask for bread. God doesn’t play tricks or games like that.

On the other hand, God is not like a magic genie. You won’t get everything you wish for. **God won’t necessarily give you everything you *want*, but he will supply all of your *needs*** (Philippians 4:19).

- Why is prayer a great privilege? If prayer is such a privilege then why do we forget or neglect to pray? What are the consequences of not praying?
- What does “ask, seek, and knock” look like when you pray?
- What do you receive from God when you pray? What are the good gifts? What don’t you receive from God when you pray? Why don’t you always get what you ask for from God?
- If God responds to those who ask from him with good gifts, how should you respond to those who ask from you?



Squeezing In

Matthew 7:13-14

I once went spelunking in southern West Virginia. At the bottom of the cave, almost a mile under the surface of the earth, there was a passage way called the birth canal. You get the idea that it was a tight squeeze. Indeed, it wasn't a squeeze for the faint of heart.

Jesus uses the illustration of a tight squeeze when talking about heaven. He says there are many who choose to enter by a wide passageway, but that way only leads to destruction. However, there is a narrow passageway that is hard and only a few find it, but that way leads to life.

It is interesting that Jesus refers to the way to heaven as a hard and narrow passage. You'd think it would be the opposite. It's not the the narrow way is a secret door. God doesn't play games like that. The narrow way is rather easy for Jesus is the Way (John 14:6), but few choose to follow him. Look to Jesus and you found the way.

- How do you compare and contrast the two ways? How is either way a matter of life or death?
- Why would the way to Jesus be narrow and hard? How have you found it to be hard?
- Why would more consider the wide passage way? Why is it easier to go with the crowd?



Bearing Fruit

Matthew 7:15-20

Growing up my grandparents had a apple tree that produced a lot of apples. We would make apple pie and apple sauce from the tree. However as the tree aged it succumb to a disease that stunted the tree. The tree no longer produced good apples. Eventually, my grandpa had to cut it down.

You know the type of tree by the fruit it bears. An apple tree bears apples. Never will you see an apple tree bearing bananas or grapefruit. Never can you make a bad apple tree bear good apples.

Jesus uses this illustration when talking about the heart, particularly the heart of a teacher. Jesus warns about false teachers who are wolves but disguised as sheep. They look good and sound good, but they are actually bad on the inside. They are dangerous.

Some teachers may be really good teachers and be very persuasive. Today, there are certain teacher who do not believe the entire Bible is true or that Jesus is God. These teachers may get really close to the truth, but they overlook important truths. They are dangerous.

Sooner or later you will know a tree by its fruit. You will know whether the tree is good or bad by its fruit of lack thereof. If a teacher's words don't match the Word of God then you must be careful.

- How is the illustration of the tree that bears or doesn't bear fruit helpful to you?
- What kind of false teachers did Jesus warn about? What kinds of false teachers are visible today?
- How do you determine what is a truth or a lie? How can you eventually see whether a person's fruit is good or bad?
- What would others say about the fruit you bear?



Unknown

Matthew 7:21-23

The worst fear for most humans is to be unknown or unacknowledged. Could you imagine life entirely alone without anyone noticing you exist? That would be horrible. Worse yet would be coming to the end of your life and standing before God and hearing him say, “I never knew you.”

That will be a reality for some. Some people may appear to be close to God, they may even do amazing things in his name, but underneath they really were doing it in their own name. God is jealous for his name. He doesn't like when people steal the glory of his name.

The reason that some are unknown by God is that these people neglect to know God. They want to be known by the godly things they do, but they have no personal relationship with God. They deny God therefore they will be denied by him (cf. 10:33).

It is a wonderful thing to know God and by known by him. You can have a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe. It is something he wants too.

- What does it mean or look like to have a personal relationship with God? Why do some neglect having a relationship with God?
- What does it mean to be to unknown by God? Is there anything unknown to God?
- Why isn't our acceptance with God based on the kinds of activities or profession we have? What is our acceptance based upon?
- What comfort does it bring to you to be known by God?



House on the Rock

Matthew 7:24-29

I grew up in Wisconsin not far from a place called The House on the Rock. It is an amazing house bit of architecture actually built high upon a chimney rock. It is best known for the Infinity Room and World's Largest Carousel, which has made it a the national tourist destination.

In Jesus final sermonette from the mount he tells a story about a man who built his house on a rock. When a storm came the house remained firm and did not fall because it was founded on the rock. He related this to a person who hears his words. If they listen and obey they will be as wise as the one who builds his house on the rock.

However, in contrast, those who do not listen nor obey Jesus words will be like a foolish man who builds his house on sand. When the storm comes the house falls and washes away. Ultimately the house is destroyed.

Wisdom and folly are founded on whether on hears the words of Jesus and obeys. Jesus only gives two options to his followers and hearers.³² To be a follower of Jesus is to also follow what he says and do it.

- Why is building on rock better than sand? Have you ever observed this in real life?
- What might the storm of "rain and wind" represent? What does the foundation "the rock" represent?
- By what authority did Jesus speak? Why is that important? How did the people respond to his teachings?³³
- As you look back on Jesus sermons from Matthew 5-7, which are hardest for you to hear or obey? Why?

³² Only two courses of action are possible—two kinds of roads and gates (Matthew 7:13–14), two kinds of trees and fruit (vs.15–20), two kinds of foundations and builders (vs.24–27).

³³ cf.13:54; 22:33; Mark 1:22; 6:2; 11:18; Luke 4:32; [Acts 13:12]



KING'S MIRACLES, PART 1

A Leper, a Centurion, a Peter's Mother-in-Law

Matthew 8:1-17

The title of today's study might sound like the opening line of a joke, "Three people walked in a bar: a leper, a centurion and Peter's mother-in-law." However, this is no joke. These three people were real and Jesus would change their lives.

Jesus wasn't the Greatest Showman. He didn't do illusions or tricks. He did draw crowds and wowed them not for the profit of his pockets, but for the profit of people's souls. Jesus performed many miracles, moreover he touched lives.

In Matthew 8, we see three different miracles. The first two people couldn't be more different. One shamed and the other honored. The first was a leper who would have been ostracized by the community. He came to Jesus asking to be made clean. Jesus touched him and he became clean. The second man was a centurion, a soldier who had authority over at least 100 soldiers. He acknowledged Jesus authority and believed that Jesus could heal his servant from a distance and he did.

The final person was Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with a fever. Jesus came to her house and touched her and the fever left. Thereafter, many people with different issues came to Jesus. Jesus healed many of them. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 700 years prior, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."³⁴

- God's God still perform miracles? Have you heard stories of people who were miraculously healed? Please, share.
- Why was Jesus more than a showman?
- What amazed you about Jesus in the three miraculous scenes? Which of the people can you most relate to? Why?

³⁴ cf. Isaiah 53:4



A Cost

Matthew 8:18-22

Most people in Jesus shoes would be enamored by the types of crowds that followed him, but Jesus wasn't. He could see their the facade and into their hearts. He knew not all followed him because they really believed. In order to demonstrate the type of follower Jesus isn't seeking he mentions two types of fo-followers.

First, **some follow Jesus until the going gets tough.** Where Jesus traveled there wasn't a Holiday Inn or Sleeper Number bed. In fact, Jesus didn't know where he would sleep most nights. God would provide as always, but it was a walk of faith. Jesus followers would have to share in his homelessness. Jesus knew the scribe was not ready to commit to the weary and uncomfortable road of following.

Second, **some follow Jesus until there is an excuse not to follow.** In Jesus day, the pink slip out of any situation would be the sickness or death of a relative. It's not that Jesus was insensitive towards this man whose father was dying, but he knew that this man would have excuse after excuse why he should follow immediately. In the order of priority Jesus is first and everything else is second.

There is a cost to following Jesus. That cost may be loss of comfort or all-in commitment. Jesus has his way of separating the crowd from those who are interested but uncommitted and the followers who are committed to follow to the end.

- 💬 Why is following Jesus tough? What other excuses do we make for not following Jesus?
- 💬 What are the other costs of following Jesus like comfort and commitment?
- 💬 What kind of follower is Jesus looking for? What kind of follower are you?



A Storm Stops

Matthew 8:23-27

I remember fishing with my dad when I was a teenager on a small lake in upper Wisconsin. It was a beautiful and sunny day and the small mouth bass were hitting hard. Out from the middle of nowhere came a strong wind and ominous clouds. Within no time we were engulfed in a torrent of rain. Immediately, we hopped on the waves and beached ourselves on the sandy shoreline and waited out the storm.

I imagine this being a little of what it was like for Jesus and his disciples while they were out to sea. The wind howled, the boat rocked, the rains soaked, and they scared out of their lives. It must have been a doozy of a storm for these longtime fishermen to be so afraid.

Then there is Jesus. He was asleep like a child in his mothers arms despite the chaos around him. That was until the disciples woke him up in a fright. Could you imagine the looks on their faces? Jesus' first words to these men are astonishing. He said, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" It might sound insensitive at first knowing the seriousness of the situation, but not so much when you think about what these men had witnessed just hours before in Matthew 8.

Jesus had already showed his great power over physical sickness and demon possession. Now he would show his power over nature. He stood up and spoke to the winds and sea. Immediately, there was a great calm and the storm stopped.

Nothing was too big for Jesus nor would he forsake those who followed him.

- ☞ Have you ever been in a fearful situation like the disciples in the boat? Please, share. Have you ever gone through struggles and thought God was sleeping or insensitive?
- ☞ Was Jesus being insensitive when he said his followers had little faith? What did he mean by that?
- ☞ Why is fear the opposite of faith? How could Jesus have such peace in a panic-prone situation?
- ☞ Why is Jesus power over nature some amazing? If you were on the sea that day with Jesus why would you marvel too?



A Healing and a Herd of Pigs

Matthew 8:28-34

We live in a world fascinated, even obsessed by the supernatural particularly its darker side. Just observe all the ghostly TV shows and horror movies on the market and you see it isn't so subtle.

The story of Jesus and the two demon possessed men is something that would be in the genre of the supernatural. The two men were living in a cemetery, they had an evil power, and people were afraid to come close out of fear of them. It is something you would see in a horror film, but it is real life.

What is interesting in this story is that **the demons that possessed the men knew who Jesus was and they were afraid of him.** They begged Jesus to cast them into pigs rather than casting them away altogether. They knew Jesus had that kind of power and authority (cf. Revelation 12:12).

Jesus gave the demons permission to enter the pigs and the pigs threw themselves into the sea and drowned. What this shows us is what the demons were trying to do to the men—destroy them, but it ultimately shows us the power that Jesus has over the supernatural world. Jesus tells us in John 16:33, “Take heart! I have overcome the world.”

- 💬 What amazes you about Jesus in this story? How is Jesus so powerful and authoritative, even over Satan and demons?
- 💬 Why is the supernatural world something not to play around with or entertain yourself with?
- 💬 How did Jesus overcome the world? How is he your overcomer?



A God Moment

Matthew 9:1-8

It is said that words are cheap and that actions speak louder than words. This is often because people say a lot but don't back up those words with anything. Jesus has already said a lot, but he has backed it up with marvelous actions.

Jesus is met by a group of friends who want to see their paralyzed friend healed. Jesus sees in them what others can't see—their faith. This was an unforgettable moment for the man and others standing around.

What Jesus says next shocks the religious community. He doesn't heal the man immediately, rather he forgives the man's sins. He knows this shocks them so he asks, "Is it easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say rise up and walk?" Of course both are impossible for the normal human being.

Jesus has demonstrated his power to heal, cast out demons, stop storms, and now he demonstrates his power to forgive sins. Only God can do that. Exactly. This was his God moment.

Jesus reminds us about the importance of being made right with him through the forgiveness of our sins. We often come to Jesus with a whole list of needs and wants. These things matter to him, but what matters most is the condition of your heart.

Jesus wants you to be right with him before anything else in your life is made "right."

- ☞ How does Jesus have the power to forgive sins? How does this moment reveal he is God?
- ☞ Why does it matter to God that you are right with him before things in your life are made right?
- ☞ Is there sin in your life that you need to ask God to forgive? Is there someone you need to forgive?



A Taxman, Sinners, and the Sick

Matthew 9:9-13

When you build a team you most often look for the strongest, wisest, or most skilled players. The misfits and stragglers are usually picked last. Jesus oddly picked the last to be first.³⁵ He picked the most unordinary team to be his followers.

One day Jesus saw a taxman and talked to him. Most people wouldn't make eye contact with the taxman out of fear of having to pay up or being seen with him. However, Jesus connected with Matthew the taxman and not only talked to him, but called him to follow.

Jesus hung around with unordinary people. People with labels and reputations. This didn't bother Jesus as much as it bothered others, particularly the religious establishment. When questioned by them why he associated with such people like Matthew, Jesus responded, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."

Jesus had Matthew's back. He was merciful to those who needed mercy. He came to save sinners, not to make the self-righteous more righteous. When Jesus picked a team he picked a winning team with losers, outsiders, and sinners. He took the least likely follower, gave him a second chance, and put him on the path to glory.

- ☞ Why would Jesus hanging with sinners and tax collectors make the religious leaders question or be uncomfortable? What kind of sinners does the church label?
- ☞ What does it mean "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"?³⁶ What is the meaning of mercy? Why is everyone in need of mercy?
- ☞ How does Jesus have our back like he had Matthew's? How do you see the mercy and compassion of Christ in this text?

³⁵ cf. 19:30; 20:16

³⁶ see Hosea 6:6; Matthew 23:23; Mark 12:33



A Do-Righter and A Different Way

Matthew 9:14-17

How do you relate to God? Many commonly view God as a ruler-checker or judge. Therefore we feel God is watching our every move with an unblinking eye. We fret that we aren't filling in enough marks on our checklist or doing all the right things so that God is not ticked with us.

Jesus did not view God like that. He himself wasn't into checklists or favor do-righters. He was much more into a personal relationship with his followers. He was into a new way of relating to God. This is why Jesus uses the illustration of a new patch or new wineskin. This is an illustration that does not make a lot of sense in our modern day culture since people today don't use wine in a skin. A used wineskin could not be reused otherwise it would burst and waste the wine. It would be like trying to put a peeled orange back in its peel.

Jesus showed a newer and fuller way of viewing God. The Old Testament was beneficial but it did not contain all that Jesus and the New Way offered. The old crust way had to be replaced with new refreshing way. Jesus didn't come to patch up the old way of doing things or to scold those who weren't doing the right thing like the religious leaders of the John followers of his day.

What Jesus showed is that **Jesus cares to have a relationship with people, including you.** He loves you. He wants to spend time with you. He wants to know you. He cares for you more than he cares that you do all the right things for him.

- How did you view God as a child, young adult, or an adult? How do you view God presently? How has your view of God changed? Why?
- How does Jesus help us to see and know God? How does Jesus care deeply for people?
- Why is doing the right things for God not the same thing as knowing God or being loved by God?
- What kinds of old rules keep you from following the New Way?



A Healing Faith and A No Joke Girl

Matthew 9:18-26

Faith is the ingredient God looks for in people. Noah spent hundreds of years building a boat even before the first sprinkle of rain fell from the sky. Abraham left his home to go to a promised land he himself would not reach. Joseph was given a dream that others mocked leading to multiple imprisonments in Egypt. Moses stood before Pharaoh and led his people through the wilderness back to the edge of the promise land. Joshua marched around Jericho. Gideon fought with 300. David fought a giant. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal. The common thread in each story was faith.

Faith says back to God, "I believe what you say even when I cannot see it. I believe you can do the impossible. I believe you will accomplish your purposes." Faith is your whole self trusting God to do what he does.

Jesus could heal and he did. When Jesus was interrupted by a ruler who was begging him to come heal his daughter Jesus saw his faith and went to his house. On the way there was a parenthetical miracle. As Jesus walked through the crowded street an unclean woman touched his clothes. She is instantly healed from a twelve year struggle. What healed her was her faith that Jesus could heal.

When Jesus reached the ruler's house there was already a funeral gathered for the ruler's daughter. The crowd laughed at Jesus when he said the girl was only sleeping. The father's faith was right. It was no joke. Jesus could heal his daughter and he did.

💬 What is faith? Why is faith so important to God?

💬 Why did Jesus heal the woman and girl in this story? Does God still heal today? Why doesn't God heal everyone? Is it because people lack faith?

💬 What story of faith in the Scripture encourages your own faith? Why? What area(s) in your life do you struggle to have faith in what God says or what God can do?



A Blind Following and A Speechless Man

Matthew 9:27-34

Helen Keller was born both blind and deaf. She learned to communicate despite with the help of a tutor, even though she did not have two of the main senses for normal communication. She went on to be the first person who was blind and deaf to graduate from college. She went on to write, lecture, and make social reforms.

Jesus had the power to heal the senses. We have already seen how he healed the body and now he would heal sight and speech. While journeying on there were two blind men that followed Jesus. When the men cried out to Jesus for mercy, he healed them because of their faith. Then a man who could not speak because he was oppressed by a demon was brought to Jesus. He cast out the demon and the man spoke.

It is no wonder that crowds marveled at Jesus. Jesus could transform the eyes and mouth. He had power to heal and free. He had control over the natural and supernatural. Never before or after has there been a man like Jesus.

Helen Keller once said, “I don’t want to waste my life. I don’t want to spend my life. I want to invest my life.” A follower of Jesus Christ should have the same high aspirations, particularly investing their life to know and follow Jesus.

- Why did people follow Jesus? What marvels you about about Jesus?
- Why is it a worthwhile investment to know and follow Jesus?
- How can you invest in knowing and following Jesus? How do you desire to see and hear Jesus more clearly?



A Huge Harvest (of the Hurting)

Matthew 9:35-38

I've lived most of my adult life in Indiana. The amount of corn and soybeans grown in Indiana are astronomical. Statistics show that Indiana harvests 20% of the nations popcorn. Indiana once had a slogan that said, "Indiana feeds the world." While that is a little farfetched, certainly their fields feed millions.

While Indiana's popcorn harvest is impressive, it pales in comparison to the harvest God is generating. God is about harvesting people. What is amazing is that the type of people God harvests aren't the cream of the crop at least to our eyes.

Jesus has compassion on the sick and harassed. Its never fun to be sick, but it is compounded if there is no one to wish you well or help you when you are sick. Sadly, most of the sick Jesus heal were previously abused and neglected by the religious establishment. It is said that these people were not only unable to help themselves, but their was no one willing to help them. Instead their spiritual counselors told to suck it up, trust God more, or not to bother them with their issues. Jesus wasn't a normal rabbi. He touched sick people when those that should have had not.

Jesus shepherds the rejects. It is said of the people Jesus loved that they were "like sheep without a shepherd."³⁷ Jesus was not like ordinary shepherds. He was patient with the limping and wounded sheep.

Hurting and rejected people surround us in mass. They are in desperate need of a tender touch. Moreover Jesus calls out for more shepherds because the harvest is huge.

Will you be one of those shepherds?

- How has Jesus healed your wounds inflicted by rejection or non-compassionate responses?
- What does compassion look like to you? Who is someone near you that needs a caring shepherd?
- Why does the world need more shepherds? Will you pray to the Lord to send out more shepherds?

³⁷ cf. Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings. 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5



A Sending Out

Matthew 10:1-15

Imagine you are moving your home, but you are alone and without help. You got your boxes pack and in the truck. However, the bigger items like the fridge, piano, couch, and queen size bed are too much for you. What do you do? You have a choice to either break your back trying to get the items into the truck or you ask for help.

Jesus called his disciples together. He was going to send them out into Jewish towns to proclaim the good news. He would give them power to heal and authority to cast out demons. It wasn't that the job was too much for Jesus, but that he was sharing the load and preparing his followers for the day he would not be with them. He was also training them to be shepherds of people.

As Jesus sent out his followers he was teaching them to live by faith. That meant they were to go freely, without simple provisions, accepting hospitality, and seeking people of peace. If there was none, then they were to move on to the next town.

Jesus strategy was simple. Go. Go and shepherd my people. Jesus was concerned about his people. He called them "lost sheep".³⁸ He himself told the story of a shepherd who left the 99 for the one who was lost. The one lost sheep mattered to Jesus and they are to matter to us too.

- What sort of things did Jesus send out his followers to do? Which of these tasks still characterize his followers today?
- What is a "person of peace"? How do you know you if a person is a "person of peace"?
- How is Jesus' strategy for reaching the world wise and compassionate? Where and to whom is he sending you?

³⁸ cf. 9:36; 18:12; Psalm 119:176; Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 50:6



A Speaker through You

Matthew 10:16-25

In the past century more were persecuted for their faith than all the centuries before combined. Christians are the most hated faith in the world and throughout history.³⁹

Why is that? Isn't Christianity a faith of grace and peace? It comes back to Jesus. Jesus himself was persecuted and he also promised that persecution would come for those who followed him.

Jesus said he would send his followers out as "sheep among wolves." He warned his followers to expect problems and be devoured. He said that telling people the good news would be hard. His followers would have to leave their homes behind and travel light. They would even face rejection, persecution, and death, even at the hand of their loved ones.

Jesus told His followers not to worry about what to say when they were arrested and had to testify about him in court. They didn't have to figure out what to say on their own. **The Holy Spirit would speak through them.**⁴⁰

The Holy Spirit still gives courage and the right words to his followers. To know that God speaks through you is comforting especially in the most tongue-tied situations. The Holy Spirit is your voice box. All you need to do is be silent and let him give you the words to say.

- How does Jesus keep with the theme of sheep and shepherd throughout Matthew chapter 10? How is this passage a precursor to Matthew 28:19-20?
- Why doesn't Jesus promise an easy or comfortable life for his followers? How does the promise of the Holy Spirit bring comfort?
- What is endurance? How is endurance a big deal to God especially through difficulties?⁴¹
- What keeps you for telling others about Jesus? How have you seen the Holy Spirit speak through you?

³⁹ cf. 24:9; John 15:18-21

⁴⁰ John 15:26

⁴¹ cf. 24:13; Mark 13:13; Daniel 12:12, 13; James 5:11; Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 3:6



A Fearlessness (from the Husetops)

Matthew 10:26-33

One of man's biggest fears is the fear of being alone. Sometimes Christians can go through the day and believe that they are alone. We can feel like God has walked away or abandoned us to do our task alone. As result of this fear we can believe all sorts of lies about God: his omnipresence, assurance, his love, his protection.

Some of the Jesus followers struggled along the way. They were threatened, intimidated, and beaten. They ran away, hid, and denied that they even knew Jesus. But ultimately, they faced persecution for Jesus' sake and had the courage to die while proclaiming the good news that Jesus came to save us all.

Jesus says you can have fearlessness because **you are safe in God's presence**. You do not have to fear threats or actions of people who may take your life for Jesus sake because the one thing they cannot take is your salvation. The one who takes your life has something great to fear—the judgment of God. Save your fear for God, not man

Jesus says you can have fearlessness because **you are known and treasured by God**. Not only has he numbered the hairs on your head, but he cares for you more than the smallest bird. He cares about every tiny detail of who you are a million times over. As a follower of Jesus you are 100% his and 100% in him.

The bully wins when he silences you by his threats. The enemy has his way when he has caused you to fear him more than you trust God or doubt his love.

God loves you deeply and intimately. It is difficult to keep silent when you are loved that way or when you love that way. You don't care who knows. You will tell anyone who has ears. Go public. Shout it from the rooftops, "I am loved by Jesus and Jesus loves you too!"

💬 Why do people hate Christ or Christians? What do Christians fear about people, particularly unbelievers? How does that fear affect the way we thin or live?

💬 What does a fear of man compare to a fear of God?

💬 How does this passage encourage you to trust God? How does Jesus encourage your assurance in God?



A Sword

Matthew 10:34-39

During the Civil War in the United States of America the boundary lines between the north and the south cut through family lines. Families fought families. Brothers fought brothers. It was brutal and personal. Nearly 600,000 perished and almost all homes were affected with loss.

Jesus brought division. Jesus said that he came not to bring peace, but the sword. This sounds odd and backwards compared to many of the teaching that came from the Prince of Peace, but Jesus followers would become the most persecuted and rejected of all time, especially by their own family members.⁴² Being a Christian would mean great loss, brutality, and division.

Jesus expects undivided love. Another odd saying is when Jesus said, “Whoever loves father and mother (or son or daughter) more than me is not worthy of me.” Does Jesus really want his followers to hate their family? No. He is using hyperbole. In other words, he is saying your love for me should be so great that it seems like you hate everyone else.

Jesus encourages death to self.⁴³ Jesus doesn’t want you to concern yourself with yourself because there you will only be lost in yourself, which is a deadly pursuit. However, if you forget about yourself and seek Jesus you will find both yourself and life in him. Jesus is a win win.

The cost of following Jesus is high and painful. He is like a sword that strikes close to home dividing things like peace, loyalty, and pride.⁴⁴ This may sound extreme in a society that is comfortable and where civil war is only a thing of history books. The truth is no matter where you live, you cannot follow Jesus without having to make crucial choices of where your ultimate loyalty lies.

💬 What is the cost of following Jesus? Why is following Jesus divisive and painful at times?

💬 Why is following Jesus a win win? What do you gain and find in Jesus more than just yourself?

💬 How does your love for Jesus compare to your parents, children or spouse? How can you cultivate your love for Jesus?

⁴² cf. vs. 21-22

⁴³ cf. 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25

⁴⁴ see Revelation 19:11-20



A Reward

Matthew 10:40-42

In the ancient near east to give a cup of cold water to a guest was a simple gesture of hospitality. No rewards, trophies, medals of honor or Nobel Peace Prize are given to people who give a cup of cold water. It is an expected gift that a guest deserves.

Making significant sacrifices—big or small—for others is hard. It is especially hard when there is no immediate reward, no accolades, or acknowledgement.

In Jesus first conversation with his disciples he talked to them about the rejection, persecution, and then he described the sacrifices they would have to make. He didn't start with all the amazing benefits or rewards they'd receive. He didn't say, "If you follow Me, you'll get five weeks of vacation each year, an insurance package, and a company donkey!" No, He started with the hard stuff. It's a wonder that the disciples didn't just pack up and leave right then and there.

Jesus knew that following him would be a hard for them. And it is for you too. It's a sacrifice to think of others before yourself. **Sacrificing is more than just your gift to God. It's God's gift to you.** He blesses those who put themselves second. The reward we receive is the grace of God, an undeserved gift great infinitely greater than a cup of cold water.

- 💬 What do people have to give up to follow Jesus? What do you sacrifice to follow Jesus?
- 💬 Even though there might not be immediate rewards in this life for following Jesus, what are the ultimate rewards for following him?
- 💬 What are the "cups of cold water" you can give out to others this week?



KING'S MISSION & REJECTION

No Doubt

Matthew 11:1-24

If you're coughing, sneezing, feverish, achy, and your nose is stuffed up, then without a doubt you're sick. It doesn't take a doctor to diagnose it because the evidence is stacked up high enough.

John's job was to prepare the way for the Messiah.⁴⁵ He thought Jesus was that guy. Now John was having some doubts whether Jesus was really the Messiah or not. So John sends some messengers to Jesus to find out the truth.

Jesus gave John the Baptist some valuable advice for dealing with doubt. Jesus told John's followers to go back and tell him to consider the evidence: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." John probably thought, with all of that evidence, Jesus must be the Savior I've been telling everyone about.

Jesus doesn't mock John's doubt, rather he affirms John's ministry. This is beautiful. It is as if Jesus says to John, "You are not rotting in prison for nothing. You did the right thing. You are a true prophet. I am who you said I was. Believe." John was expecting Jesus to bring swift judgment on the unbeliever and unrepentant. Jesus assures John that that judgment will come in time, but for moment the Messiah also came to heal.⁴⁶

Doubt is common to all, but all don't have to doubt for long when they consider all that Jesus did and said. Look, listen, and believe.

- 💬 What are the common doubts that Christians have? What evidence around you shows that God exists? Why do you believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world?
- 💬 What are the consequences of not believing in Jesus despite all the evidence? (note 11:16-17, 20-24)
- 💬 How has God affirmed your belief and comforted your doubts?

⁴⁵ cf. 3:1-3; Malachi 3:1

⁴⁶ Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1-2



Come to Me

Matthew 11:25-30

I have four children under the age of seven. For seven years my wife and I have had some sleepless nights as we've cared for our little ones in the middle of the night. What do little children and weary adults have in common? We need rest and care.

Jesus offers this. He invites us to come to him.

Jesus brings rest to the soul. He knows we are created to need a certain amount of hours of sleep each night. He knows we become wearied by troubles and burned out by work. He knows we tire from the demands of religion. Jesus offers deep rest.

Jesus makes our burdens lighter. It's important to remember that Jesus didn't say He would get rid of our burdens completely. He said He would make our burdens lighter. It is heavier to deal with difficulties alone, but Jesus offers to carry the burden with him if we allow him.

Jesus helps us to know the intimacy and knowledge of God. The Father Son relationship is a picture of true rest and care. When the world is chaotic we can find peace, intimacy, and safety in God's hands. Simply come to him.

- 💬 What does it mean to you to hear Jesus say, "Come to Me"?
- 💬 How does God lighten burdens and give rest to the soul? How does the Father Son relationship illustrate this perfectly?
- 💬 What does it look like for you to rest in God's hand and to allow him to carry your burdens? Write your own prayer of thanks to God.



Missing the Point, Part 1

Matthew 12:1-8

“But we’ve always done it this way.” Have you every heard someone say this? Maybe you’ve said it. For some people it is more comfortable to embrace tradition and ridicule change than to understand why we hold tight to the tradition in the first place.

Jesus did things differently. He wasn’t against tradition. He loved the law. He obeyed it. He even said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

What Jesus said and did offended some long-held Jewish traditions. When he picked grains on the sabbath to feed his followers he was accused by law-keepers of not keeping the sabbath holy.

The Pharisees missed the point. They were quick to adhere to the tradition of the Sabbath according to the law but failed to understand the teaching of Jesus that “the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” They were too preoccupied with rules, regulations and empty sacrificial offerings that they missed the meaning of the message of Jesus on the mercy and love of God.

The Pharisees were stuck in a habit of finding fault—an easy trap for religious people to fall into. They were well-intentioned, but while paying careful attention to the details, they forgot the bigger picture that people matter more to God than traditions.

Look at others with the eye of Jesus. Pray for a greater ability to understand and forgive the shortcomings of others—and your own. If not, you are missing the point.

- What are some traditions that you have? What do you enjoy about those traditions? Why do you have those traditions? Why would Jesus include the story of David and the temple bread (1 Samuel 21:1-6)?
- How can a Christian miss the point of a tradition or rule? How did the Pharisees miss the point on Jesus? How is it easy to worship the tradition rather than God?
- How do you see compassion in Jesus in this story? How does his compassion compare to the Pharisees?



Missing the Point, Part 2

Matthew 12:9-14

A few years ago there was a commercial sponsored by Berlitz language learning courses that showed a veteran German Coast Guard leaving a rookie guard at the helm. Immediately the rookie receives an SOS call from an English vessel in distress, “We are sinking!” To which the rookie guard responds, “What are you *sinking* about?”

Talk about missing the point. When it comes to language and culture we can easily miss the point of what someone is saying or doing. This happened to Jesus too. Even though he was a Jew, living among Jews, worshiping the same God as his fellow Jews, many still missed the point of what he was saying or doing.

Jesus came to a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath. When it should have been a moment of celebration it became a moment of testing by religious leaders who already accused Jesus of not respecting the law of the Sabbath.

It wasn’t that Jesus was being insensitive or dishonored the Sabbath, he was actually seeking to bring the God-followers more in line with the Sabbath. Sabbath itself means *restoration*. What was Jesus doing? He was restoring a person’s hand. He was ministering to a person in need. What Jesus was demonstrating was that the restoration of a person was more important than the keeping of a tradition.⁴⁷

- Have you ever missed the point of what someone was saying? What happened?
- What is the meaning of Sabbath? How does this help you understand why Jesus did and said what he did about the Sabbath? How does Jesus use the law to teach the sabbath?⁴⁸
- How have you miss the point of sabbath? How has sabbath been a means of the restoration of yourself and others around you?

⁴⁷ 6:26; 10:31

⁴⁸ see Ex. 23:4, 5; Deut. 22:4



Servant King

Matthew 12:15-21

We tend to work for the weekend or count the days until their next vacation. We rest from our work. However, Jesus flips the paradigm. He works out of his rest. Jesus frequently withdrew from the crowds. Although he healed many he was still human and needed time away to recharge and renew with his Father.

Matthew caught this. He made the power connection between Jesus and the Servant Songs of Isaiah the prophet.⁴⁹ Jesus came not to stir up controversy or rebellion. He came to show compassion and show what a relationship with God looked like.

Jesus could have used his right as a Mighty King to sway the crowds, but he chose to rule as a Lowly Servant. This is how God chose to make his entrance as the Messiah. This is why many didn't catch Jesus as the Messiah, rather viewed him as a menace.

As a Servant King, Jesus showed how victory could be won through gentleness and nonviolence. He showed how humility could bring down the proud. He showed how hope could inspire the hopeless. He showed how healing could mend the broken. He showed how serving others is God's way.

- 💬 What does Matthew see about Jesus that many did not see? What do you see about Jesus in this passage that is surprising or encouraging?
- 💬 How do you see the Trinity at work in this passage? Why would that be important?
- 💬 Who is God calling you to serve?
- 💬 What is the importance of withdrawing from work? What would it look like for you to work out of your rest?

⁴⁹ cf. Isa. 42:1-3; 61:1 [Luke 4:18; John 3:34; Acts 10:38]; 42:4



Take a Side

Matthew 12:22-37

"Either you are with me or you are against me."

Jesus spoke these words to his naysayers. His naysayers had accused him of siding with Satan since he was able to heal the sick, give hearing to the deaf, and give sight to the blind. Those were serious words of accusation.

Jesus clears the air. It's as if he says, "Actually, you are confused. If you do not believe that I am from God with all that I've done, then you are guilty of blasphemy of the Spirit." Jesus makes the case that if he was partners with Satan then why would he work contrary to Satan and do signs showing the kingdom of God was in-breaking, which would usher in the defeat of Satan. Jesus wasn't on the same side as Satan. Through signs and wonders he was showing the Spirit of God at work.

While some doubted Jesus, others were completely convinced his power was proof that he was the *Son of David* or the Messiah. As Jesus said, "A tree is known by its fruit." Jesus' good fruit showed that he was good and not evil like the religious leaders who challenged him.

The religious leaders didn't know which side they were on. They didn't recognize their evil, nor did they recognize Jesus' good. What these leaders didn't understand was that words are powerful and should be taken seriously. Words can be salvation or damnation. Jesus encourages them to take a side.

- ☞ Which side are you on? What was threatening about Jesus to the religious leaders? Can you understand their accusations?
- ☞ How is Satan in the business of taking sides or confusing the sides?
- ☞ Have you ever fought with Jesus? What are common fights people pick with Jesus?
- ☞ How can you tell what is a good or bad tree? What kind of tree are you and why?



Stubbornness

Matthew 12:38-45

The area we live in Africa has a lot of donkeys that roam the streets. In fact, the joke is they are the kings of the road because they just stand in the middle of the road and you have to go around them. Donkeys are known to be stubborn and so can people. To be stubborn is to have or show dogged determination not to change one's attitude or position on something, especially in spite of good arguments or reasons to do so.

One of the most stubborn people in the Bible was the Pharaoh during Moses life.⁵⁰ Pharaoh was leader of the most powerful nation on earth. He was considered a god among their gods. He rule ruthlessly and enslaved the Israelites. When Moses was sent to demand that Pharaoh let God's people go he wouldn't do it, despite all the signs and plagues. It took one final plague when his own son died. Only then did he let the people go, but in his stubbornness he chased down the Israelites to the Red Sea where his army was drown.

The most stubborn group of people in the Bible were the Pharisees and scribes. These religious leaders saw Jesus do many signs and wonders. They even asked Jesus to perform a miracle, but in this instance Jesus refused because he knew they would not believe he was God.

Jesus shared a story with them about how years ago people came from miles around to hear the wisdom of King Solomon.⁵¹ However, the things he talked about were far wiser than anything Solomon said, and the Pharisees wouldn't even cross the street to listen to him. These men were too stubborn to hear what Jesus had to say. They didn't believe in Jesus because they didn't *want* to believe Him. They were blind and homes to many homeless spirits.

- ☞ What are your stubborn habits or beliefs? Why were the Pharisees so stubborn? Even if they did not believe, why would they ask Jesus to perform a miracle?
- ☞ Have you known stubborn people like Pharaoh or the Pharisees? How does this interaction with Jesus help or encourage you? Can Jesus heal their blindness?
- ☞ What was the purpose for Jesus including the sign of Jonah? How does this sign relate to Jesus? How is the story of the evil spirits both humorous and serious?
- ☞ Do you have any stubborn beliefs about Jesus that need to change? If yes, what are they?

⁵⁰ Read Exodus 5-15

⁵¹ 1 Kgs. 10:1; 2 Chr. 9:1



Thicker than Blood

Matthew 12:46-50

Family bonds are strong. Even when we haven't had the best relationship with our parents or siblings or we live far from them or we were adopted into a new family, we can't shake the notion that we are someone's child. We are bonded by blood. Yet there is a bond stronger than any earthly family—God's family.

While Jesus was talking with his followers his mother and brothers were outside. They were trying to get a message to Jesus. Someone interrupted Jesus to tell him this. In response Jesus posed an indirect question to his followers about who his family was. He then stretched out his hand to his followers and said "The one who obey's my Father is my family."

This might sound strange and harsh towards his own family. That wasn't his intention. He loved them, but he knew their struggle to believe and understand who he was. It is not clear how Jesus family responded to his teaching or ministry, but by being outside shows they may have been uncommitted. Early on they did think he was insane.⁵²

It wasn't just Jesus family that didn't understand him sometimes, it was also his followers.⁵³ So Jesus uses the situation to compare his natural family to spiritual family. It's as if Jesus says, "What is thicker than blood? Obedience to God the Father is thicker than blood."

It is interesting that many of Jesus family members were men and women of great faith. Mary believed God's message (Luke 1:26–38) and stayed with Jesus to the end. James the brother of Jesus became an apostle (1 Cor. 15:7) and went on to call his half-brother "the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (James 2:1).

When we share bloodlines through Jesus Christ our lines run deep and strong. We are part of a greater family—God's family.

💬 What are your bonds like with your family? What does it feel like to have these bonds broken?

💬 How may have Jesus been breaking with family tradition? How did Jesus both honor his family and his followers?

💬 What does it mean to be a part of God's family? How strong is this bond?

⁵² cf. Mark 3:20-21; John 7:5

⁵³ see Mark 4:41; 6:51–52; 8:31–33



KING'S MYSTERY

Seeds

Matthew 13:1-23

Stories can be very memorable and likable. Jesus told a lot of stories. In fact, Matthew records 24 stories that Jesus told. Not all his stories were caught the moment he taught them. Sometimes he had to explain them to his hearers. Other times he just left it unexplained so that those who understood were fed and those who didn't were left wondering about the mysteries he was telling them.

Many of Jesus stories told used everyday events from the lives of people around him. His first story was about a farmer and soil. In the story he described four kinds of soils that the farmer planted seed. Each soil had a different response.

Upon the Path. Seeds sown on top of the path will be snatched away by the birds. Likewise Satan comes and snatches away anything we hear and don't understand. The soil of this soul is hard.

Stony and Shallow. Seeds sown among rocks have shallow roots. Likewise truth is accepted joyfully, but anything hard that comes along in life quickly causes the word sown to shrivel and die. The soil of this soul is full of fear.

Thick Thorns. Seeds sown among thorns eventually get choked by the thorns. Likewise the worries of the world have their way of choking out the word from gaining deep roots to the soul. The soil of this soul is weak and worrisome.

Good Soil. Seeds sown in good soil produce good fruit. Likewise the word of God planted in a cultivable soul will produce much fruit. The soil of this soul is tend-able.

This story of Jesus teaches us about our understanding of God's Word and how it takes root in our lives. It is an important introduction to the stories Jesus will tell and we are meant to ask ourselves: *How do you hear the Word of God? Which soil are you? Is it producing any fruit?*

☞ Which story of Jesus is the most memorable to you? Why didn't everybody understand the stories Jesus told? Are there things in the Bible you don't understand? Who could help you understand these things better?

☞ What could be some of the distractions keeping the Word of God from gaining deep roots in your soul? How would you answer the questions in the last paragraph?



Weeds

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

This summer I have been trying to grow grass in a bare spot in our yard. I have plucked out the weeds, planted grass seeds and watered it well. However, along with the grass more weeds have grown up. Weeds propagate so quickly and are incredibly bothersome.

Jesus told story about weeds. There was a farmer who planted wheat, but while sleeping an enemy planted weeds among the wheat. The weeds and wheat grew up together. When it was time to harvest the weeds were picked and burned.

The weeds Jesus referred to were probably a kind of grass called dandelion. Unlike garden weeds, dandelion could be difficult to distinguish from wheat. In the early stages of growth it entangles with the wheat that it cannot be removed without damaging the wheat. It was a common practice for people to throw dandelion seeds into the wheat fields of their enemies because it would hurt the crops.

The truth is that evil can hide very well among good. However, evil thrown into the middle of good is always destructive. Each soul is like a wheat field and there are weeds growing among the wheat.

The good news is that Jesus tells this story about himself. He is the one who sows good seed among the world. Satan and his servants are the ones sowing weeds. Those who call themselves “believers” (or good seeds) will always be a mixed community. Only Jesus can discern between good and evil seeds, but there is coming a day when evil will lose and good will win. The weeds in the wheat field will be pulled out, judged and thrown into fire.

- Who is your enemy? What kinds of weeds does he plant in souls? What is the enemy's end?
- What encouragement is there in knowing that the weeds will be gathered and burned or knowing the enemy doesn't win? Why do our ears need to hear this?
- How will the righteous shine like the sun?⁵⁴

⁵⁴ cf. Prov. 4:18; Dan. 12:3; 1 Cor. 15:41, 42



Mustard Seed and Yeast

Matthew 13:31-35

Most things have small beginnings. Babies enter the world from one tiny cell that multiplies. Books start with words, phrases, paragraphs and chapters. Computers are launched with microchips. Marathoners training begin with stretches and short runs. Mountains are climbed with small steps.

Jesus shares a story about two things that have small beginnings—seeds and yeast. Mustard plants start as small seed. A mustard seed was common imagery for something small,⁵⁵ yet when full-grown the plant could reach up to nine feet tall.

Bread begins as flour and yeast. When handful of yeast permeates a large amount of flour it can become a lot of eatable bread. The ‘three measures’ that Jesus refers to would be enough to make bread for 100 people!

By comparison, God’s work—the kingdom of heaven —may appear unimpressive, even insignificant, but appearances can be deceptive. Although many may miss the point of what God is doing in the world, in the end, the kingdom of God will not be ignored. As followers of Jesus we must be patient as God does his work in us, through us, and around us. With God a little becomes great when he is at work.

- 💬 What is something small that becomes big?
- 💬 How can the kingdom of heaven seem small and insignificant, but is really a huge deal?
- 💬 How are Jesus stories connected to a great story told even through the Old Testament?⁵⁶
- 💬 How is God still at work today building his kingdom? How are you a part of that work?

⁵⁵ cf. 17:20

⁵⁶ cf. v.11; Ps. 78:2; Rom. 16:25, 26; 1 Cor. 2:7



A Field, a Pearl, and a Net

Matthew 13:44-52

If you have something valuable good chances you have it locked in a safe, hidden in a secret spot, or highly insured. I know a man in Africa who hid his money in a box buried in the ground. This box represents everything he has in the world. It is his kingly treasury.

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven has value too. There is no price tag on it because it is priceless, but for purpose of the story Jesus said the kingdom of heaven has value like a field, pearl or full net of fish that a man would sell everything to have in his possession.

What is different about the kingdom of heaven compared to any earthly treasure is that it lasts forever, it doesn't rust or rot, and it is deeply personal. These stories about the kingdom of heaven give the impression of a whole-hearted response; no sacrifice is too great, and there is no other concern in the world.

Having Jesus is the most valuable thing on earth. Without him you have nothing, even if you have everything by the world's standards. When everything is ripped away or burned in the fire you will always have Jesus. Having Jesus isn't "giving up" our pleasures, rather he gives deeper satisfaction and joyful. He is the field with the hidden treasure, he is the pearl of great price, he is the net full of fish of every kind.

In heaven, stuff won't matter. All that matters is if you really know Jesus, if he is your sole treasure.

- 💬 What is the most valuable thing on earth to you other than Jesus? What would you do to protect and keep this thing?
- 💬 Make a list of the things you spend the most time doing in a day. What does this show you about what you value most? What things do you value too much? What things do you need to value more? What changes can you make to seek God's kingdom first?
- 💬 Do you believe that having Jesus is more important than anything else in your life? When you truly believe this, how does it changes the way you act and think about lots of things?



Rejection Continued

Matthew 13:53-58

As a child I did not have a good reputation. My behavior got me into a lot of trouble and rejection. When I came to faith in Jesus as a young teenager my worldview and behavior radically changed. At the age of 15, I got my first job at a sporting goods store in the mall. One day one of my former elementary school teachers came into buy shoes. He did not recognize me. After helping him try on some shoes I introduced myself. His jaw dropped and he said, “Wow! I never imagined you would ever amount to anything good.”

Jesus had a similar experience. The only difference was that he had perfect behavior, he did amazing signs and wonders and he taught truths about God that made people’s jaws drop in amazement.

People still doubted Jesus, particularly from his hometown. His neighbors weren’t proud of him, rather they couldn’t take him seriously. In fact, they “took offense at him.” He was rejected by his own people. This wasn’t a new thing for messengers of God like the prophets. But that didn’t stop Jesus from preaching, healing, and doing exactly what God wanted him to do.

Rejection is common to Christians. If you face rejection for following Jesus, you’re in good company. **Fear God and fear not the rejection that comes with following Jesus for the fear of rejection will undoubtedly affect your fear of God.**

- Who are some people in the Bible who sacrificed much to follow God? What did they have to sacrifice in order to follow God?
- What sacrifices are there for following Jesus? Why might others reject you for following Jesus? What is it like to be rejected by people who are close to you?
- How is Jesus connected with his family in this story? How does this story show Jesus humanness? Why might those close to him reject his divineness? Have you ever had a hard time being taken seriously by those who have watched you grow up?
- Why do you value Jesus? Are you willing to give up the things you value to do what God asks you to do, even if that means rejection?



KING'S MIRACLES, PART 2

A Big Deal

Matthew 14:1-12

When I was in high school I stood in a line for more than three hours to get an autograph from Ray Nitschke, the famous linebacker of the storied Green Bay Packers. It was a big deal. When my time came to meet him I handed him my mini Packers helmet with shaky sweaty hands. After he finished signing he stood up, looked me in the eyes, and shook my hand. He was brute on the field, but a gentleman in real-life.

Jesus was becoming a big deal. He drew crowds and became famous. Those in high powers didn't like it. Anyone connected to Jesus was becoming a threat. There is a saying, that if you poke a hornets nest you probably going to get stung. John the Baptist's connection to Jesus meant he would eventually get stung.⁵⁷

John the Baptist was under arrest by King Herod. He spoke truthfully about a soap opera-like situation that was happening in the king's house. The king wrongfully took his brother's wife as his own. It was scandalous. John had to say something, but it would cost him his head. Literally.

John the Baptist was only one of many biblical figures who died for the faith. Of the eleven original disciples, ten of them were killed for preaching the gospel. **Following Jesus is a big deal and doesn't guarantee a long happy life this side of heaven, but it does mean that we can be forever with Jesus.** That's a really big deal.

💬 Have you ever met anyone who was a big deal? What was that like?

💬 Why is Jesus a big deal? How does following Jesus often draw attention to yourself? How have you been stung for following Jesus?

💬 Have you ever had to stand up for something that was right? What was the price you had to pay for this?

💬 What is the reward of following Jesus now?

⁵⁷ see more of John's connection with Jesus, cf. 4:12; 11:2



Bread of Life

Matthew 14:13-21

A few years ago we had a party. We invited out immediate neighbors in our Chadian village to celebrate the birth of our third daughter. We prepared food and drinks ahead of time, however we didn't expect that there would be so many people attending. Neighbors told their neighbors and those neighbors told their neighbors and practically the entire village came to feast with us. We wished we could have multiplied food and drinks on the spot, instead we had to ask a friend to run out and get more.

Jesus was in a similar situation. He went into the wilderness, far from any market or grocery store. He went to rest and be by himself. A crowd had followed him on foot. Jesus took compassion on them and healed them. The disciples were concerned that they were too far from civilization and it was time to send the crowds away so they could eat. It's as if they said, "We don't think we could handle a hangry crowd Jesus?"

Jesus didn't want to shoo away the crowds, he wanted to show them who he really was. Jesus asked them to gather what food they could hide from among the people in the crowd. A little boy had a lunch to share. Jesus took it, blessed it, broke it up into baskets and had the disciples distribute it. Miraculously there was more than enough to feed the crowd.

We don't know much about the boy nor his name. We never hear from him again. While he is an important character in the story he isn't the most important. Often the Sunday School emphasis is placed on the boy's lunch and how we should give everything to God, but the greater emphasis of the story is on the One who multiplied the lunch and made a miracle of it.

Jesus multiplied the bread and satisfied the crowd. He satisfies more than hunger, he can heal diseases and forgive sins too. Jesus is the Bread of Life.

- What is so significant about this miracle? How does it relate to Moses and manna from heaven? Read Exodus 16.
- How is it easy to turn attention away from Jesus towards lesser good? How can we miss the miracles he is doing all around us?
- What do you learn about Jesus' compassion, particularly after a difficult situation when he wanted to withdraw by himself? How does this encourage your own compassion to meet the needs of others and have God meet your needs too?



More than Walking on Water

Matthew 14:22-33

One of the most well known stories of Jesus was when he walked on water, yet there is more to this story than Jesus skill of buoyancy. Here are some of the less the obvious lessons of Jesus that also deserve attention.

Jesus spent time alone. Jesus often had crowds that followed him, but he intentionally found time to be by himself. He wasn't completely alone. He spent time with his Father in prayer. This is where he got his true strength. Before he even walked on water he dismissed himself to quiet himself with God.

Jesus shows strength above natural law. Jesus had already stopped a storm, he raised dead people to life, he multiplied food, cursed a fig tree and now he will walk on water. Jesus seems to have influence over the laws of gravity and of the properties of liquid water. Those laws did not change, suspend, or cancel; instead, Jesus was exercising a stronger power. He shows that he has all-power that only the Creator the wind and the waves could possess.

Jesus calms fear. When the disciples first saw Jesus up on the waters they freaked out. They thought he was a ghost or an evil spirit. Of course Jesus wasn't a ghost. There is nothing paranormal about Jesus or what he did. His power came from God. Evil spirits inflict torment, cowardice, and fear, but Jesus inspires joy, courage, and freedom from fear. There is a big difference there.

Jesus encourages belief. Peter immediately asked Jesus if he could meet him on the waters. For a moment Peter walks on water, but when took his attention off Jesus and shifted onto the wind and waves he began to sink and doubt crept in. Peter cried out, "Help!" and Jesus grabbed his hand and helped him. When they got into the boat the winds stopped. It was a lesson on faith in Jesus.

Jesus deserves our worship. On that day the disciples saw Jesus in all his glory. It was a powerful moment. Jesus wasn't an ordinary man. This moment gave extraordinary proof he was God. Undoubtedly they worshiped and acknowledged this truth. Jesus intends to wow us like he did his disciples!

- 🗣️ What are you afraid of? Can you hear Jesus assure you saying, "Do not be afraid"? When do you tend to doubt Jesus? What does it look like to take courage or Jesus by the hand?
- 🗣️ Put yourself in Peter's feet. How would you respond to Jesus statements in red?
- 🗣️ Can you imagine yourself in this story? What do you feel? Sit with Jesus in the boat after the wind has stopped. What do you have to say to the other disciples, to Jesus?
- 🗣️ What do you learn about Jesus in this story? How does Jesus wow you? What about this story causes you to worship Jesus?



More than a Touch

Matthew 14:34-36

100% of us will die. That isn't upbeat news, but it is true nonetheless. We often pray for a healing touch so that our lives can be extended a little longer and healthier. But sooner or later our hearts will give out, cancer will conquer the body, age will get the best of us, or God will decide that it is our time.

Many people came to Jesus for healing and he healed many people. They did not try to hide their pain or desperation. They were real people filled with grief, shame, fear, regret and pain. They didn't meet Jesus secretly, rather met him in public with faith that even if they touched the fringe of his clothes they could be healed.⁵⁸ That is great faith but it also shows Jesus great power.

The desire to touch Jesus sounds almost mechanical and impersonal, but this wasn't the first time this happened. The previous touch was in fact a very personal encounter (see 9:20–22). **Jesus is never too busy for the personal touch when the crowds pressed in on him.** Jesus is never too busy for you either.

Jesus has power over the body. He can heal diseases, disabilities and deformities. A touch from the master's hand can change someone's life and give them hope for the life to come. It did. And it still does.

If you believe in Jesus his Spirit dwells in you and touches every bit of who you are. Grab hold, welcome the power of God into your body, mind, and spirit. Just like those that physically touched Jesus, you too can touch him and be “made well.”

- 💬 If you could have Jesus heal anything what would you ask him to heal?
- 💬 What does the crowds desperation tell you about what they believed about Jesus?
- 💬 Have you ever thought Jesus was too busy with the crowds to care about you? How does Matthew 9:20-22 change that?
- 💬 You may never have the opportunity in this life to touch Jesus, but how has he touched you?

⁵⁸ cf. Mark 3:10; Luke 6:19; [Acts 5:15]



Cleanliness

Matthew 15:1-20

I have lived in a Muslim society for five years. I have observed many of their religious practices, which include a ceremonial washing of the hands, feet and face extensively before prayers. They will even wash this way before eating or opening their holy books. On one occasion before reading the Bible with a Muslim friend, he was appalled and asked why I did not do my absolutions before reading the Holy Book.

Jesus received a similar question from religious leaders, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?” As usual Jesus answers their question with a question. In essence Jesus asked, “You condemn them of breaking a longstanding culture practice, but do you realize you condemn yourself by not obeying the law of God?”

Whoah, Jesus laid down a trump card. His question got to the heart of the matter. You can wash yourself completely clean on the outside, but on the inside you can be dirtier than a cesspit. If you want to be clean be wholly clean inside and out.

Like God of their Jewish fathers, Jesus hears what man says with his lips, but he also sees and knows their hearts too. Their insides and outsides were not on the same page. Their lips praised God, but their heart defiled him. What comes out of their mouth defiled them because what comes out of their mouth came out of their heart.

John Calvin simply said, “The human heart is an idol factory.” And Jesus illustrates this by saying, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Jesus isn’t teaching that you shouldn’t wash your hands before you eat or you should’t care about personal hygiene. **What Jesus is teaching is that matters of the heart are significantly more important than matters of tradition.** You may have heard it said, “Cleanliness is next to godliness,” and searched to find it in the Bible, but failed because it’s not in there. What you will find are verses like Psalm 51 where David says, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” May you live out of the heart Jesus gave you.

- ☞ Is there anything about this teaching from Jesus that appalls or offends you? Why or why not? Why did it offend the Jewish leaders?
- ☞ In another story, Jesus shared about the cup that is clean on the outside, but filthy on the inside (see Luke 11:38-41). How is this a good compliment to today’s story? How clean is your cup?
- ☞ Why is it easy to honor God with our lips, but not your heart? Is there anything that is convicting about this concept to you? Could you say or write a prayer to God like Psalm 51? How can you encourage those around you to live out of the heart Jesus gave them?



Crumbs

Matthew 15:21-31

Do you have a pesky neighbor, a person whose personality rubs you wrong, or a demanding friend who always seems to have a need? They beg repeated for help, but you give in or tell them off because your internal response is annoyance.

A woman came to Jesus asking for help. She has a serious issue. Her daughter was possessed by an evil spirit. She knew Jesus had power to cast out evil spirits. There was one problem—she was a Gentile. Not only that, she was a Canaanite woman. Historically, there were racial and political tensions between Jews and Canaanites. Jesus ignores her at first because he's busy serving the Jews, but Jesus' disciples became annoyed and wanted Jesus to get her off their back.

The woman persisted. She knelt before Jesus and cried out, "Help me." Jesus responds again in a seemingly insensitive way, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."⁵⁹ Why would Jesus say that? Was he calling the woman a dog? Wasn't he going to help her?

The woman doesn't walk away in disgust, shame or despair, but responds to Jesus with a morsel of faith saying, "Yeah, but even dogs get scraps from their master's table." Wow. She responded to Jesus with a zinger!

Jesus gives in. He's impressed by her persistence and faith. She gets what she came to Jesus to get. He rewards her faith. On top of that Jesus also rewards many other Gentiles with his love and healing. They respond to Jesus with radiating worship.

It would be utterly crumbly to have a God who only favored people he liked, but Jesus shows a global love and care for all kinds of people. As the children's song says, "Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." That includes you.

- How do you imagine this woman? What does this woman teach you about persistence and faith? How are you needing persistence, openness, and humility with Jesus?
- How does the love of Jesus burst through racial, political, and national barriers? How does Jesus demonstrate that his mission is not only for Jews but all people?
- Does this story remind you of anything in your own experience, facing rejection, and persevering? Who is someone that you have a hard time loving like this woman? How can you love them like Jesus?

⁵⁹ Compare this with how Jesus responds to the Centurion in Matthew 7:6



Second Helping

Matthew 15:32-39

I have a childhood friend named Anne. One summer Anne and our youth group were visiting downtown Chicago. While walking through the busy streets we met a beggar who was asking for money. I was content to walk by unmoved, however, Anne stopped to talk to the man. Within minutes she invited him to walk with her to a nearby cafe where she bought him a hearty meal. I never forgot that vivid example of compassion.

It is easy to have compassion on someone you know, but to help a stranger out of compassion takes compassion to another level. Jesus showed compassion to four thousand hungry strangers.

Jesus reaction to the hungry crowd is polar opposite to his followers, but he was leaving them an example to follow. Certainly some of his followers looked at the crowd and were annoyed, unmoved, at laughed at its enormity. On top of that they had already seen Jesus feed more than five thousand with a little boys lunch box, albeit that crowd was Jewish.⁶⁰

Jesus wasn't laughing, he wasn't annoyed, but he was moved with compassion by the crowd. He didn't care that they weren't Jewish. He wasn't going to give them scraps or crumbs. He didn't want to send them away with an empty belly. He wanted to send them away full in body and soul. Jesus was giving this crowd a foretaste of the banquet to come where people from every tribe, tongue and nation will be gathered before him in heaven.⁶¹

💬 How do you act towards people you don't know? What about people you don't like? Is there something about Jesus compassion that is contagious to you?

💬 What would it be like to be one of the participants of this lunch with Jesus? How does it give a foretaste of the heavenly banquet?

💬 It says that those who ate were satisfied. How does Jesus satisfy every need? Are you satisfied with Jesus right now?

⁶⁰ see 14:13-21; cf. 8:1-10

⁶¹ cf. 8:11-12



KING'S MOTIVE

Bad Bread

Matthew 16:1-12

There are lots of kind of bread in the world. The Italian's have ciabatta, French have baguettes, Indian's have naan, Israeli's have challah, Polish have bagels, Mexican's have tortillas, Filipinos have pandesal, Greeks have pitas, English have cottage bread, and American's have sliced loaves. They are all so yummy.

After Jesus returned to Jewish territory he was immediately swarmed by a united opposition of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They test him by asking him to perform a sign. The contrast between Jewish skepticism and Gentile enthusiasm couldn't be more dramatic. Jesus could perform a sign for them, but they weren't any better at interpreting the weather than believing Jesus was who he said he was.

Jesus goes on to talk about yeast with his disciples. Yeast is what causes bread to grow. While Jesus had already used yeast as a symbol for the growth of God's kingdom,⁶² it was also used as a metaphor for the power of evil spreading its influence.⁶³ When the Pharisees and Sadducees demanded a sign it showed their growing resistance towards Jesus' mission. Jesus wanted to protect his followers from being infected by these evil men — also known as bad bread.

What is interesting is that while Jesus is referring to the Pharisees and Sadducees in his parable, the disciples' thought he was talking about real bread. They were hungry! They failed to see that Jesus would provide from them bread as he had done for 5,000 people and again 4,000 people with just a few loaves of bread. They had little faith despite seeing great signs.⁶⁴ It also goes to show that **one can have all the proof in the world that Jesus is God and yet still not believe.**

💬 What is your favorite kind of bread? What makes a good bread? Or a bad bread?

💬 What is a "little white lie"? What lies are the Pharisees and Sadducees believing about Jesus? How are lies like yeast to bread? How do little lies lead to big lies?

💬 How can you be like the Pharisees and Sadducees and demand signs, yet still not believe? How can you be like Jesus followers and miss the point of what Jesus is talking about?

⁶² see 13:33

⁶³ cf. 1 Cor. 5:6–8; Gal. 5:9

⁶⁴ cf. 6:25–34



The Big Quiz

Matthew 16:13-20

I remember in high school having a pop-quiz in Economic Class. There was only one question on the quiz, “What is capitalism?” We had a whole page to define and describe capitalism, but only five minutes to do it. While that quiz was laborious it wasn’t life-altering or critically important.

Jesus gave a pop-quiz to his disciples with two critically important questions. The first question was, “Who do people say I am?” It was an easy question. All they had to do was repeat what they heard on the street. Some said, “John the Baptist. Others said, “Elijah,” or “Jeremiah.” Jesus was in a class with the prophets.

Jesus went on to ask a more difficult—a deeply personal question, “Who do you say I am?” Peter raised his hand first and responded, **“You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the Living God.”** *Ding, ding, ding!* Peter put Jesus in a class all by himself above the prophets.

How did Peter know the right answer? He didn’t get it from a book or from a scholar, rather God himself revealed it to him. In ten words, Peter identified Jesus as the Savior of the world and an equal to God very God. It was a radical statement. A true statement, but also a blasphemous statement to Peter’s community and one that Jesus wasn’t ready to leak out.

Peter’s reward wasn’t an A+ or a certificate to take home and hang on the wall. The reward was an invitation to be an important part of the Messiah’s mission. To inaugurate Peter’s role, Jesus gives a beautiful wordplay with Peter’s name (meaning rock) and Peter’s solid place in spreading the church throughout the world—a mission that would not be shaken, even by the forces of evil in the world.⁶⁵

💬 What is the most difficult quiz you’ve ever taken?

💬 Who do you say that Jesus is? What does that mean to you?

💬 What was Peter’s role in building the church? What is your role?

⁶⁵ Read Acts 1-12 to see how Peter was influential in the infancy of the church.



Death and Glory

Matthew 16:21-28 (17:22-23; 20:17-19)

Transitions are a natural part of life. A seed transitions from seed to sapling to tree to firewood or lumber. A student will transition from grade school to college to career to retirement. A girl will transition from girl to bride to mother to grandmother. Nothing remains the same forever, everything transitions.

Jesus would soon face a transition in his ministry. In fact, he would begin to prepare his disciples for the day he would no longer be among them face to face. His transition would look something like death, burial, and resurrection.

This transition plan didn't go over so well at first. The news was too much to handle for some of Jesus' disciples. Peter even took Jesus aside and rebuked him for the thought of mentioning his death. Jesus didn't take lightly to Peter's rebuke because Peter misunderstood that death was part of God's plan for Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus transition in his mission was a new perspective that Jesus' disciples would have to live with. Where the disciples thought the mission of the Messiah was only earthly and political, death seemed like defeat or a dead end. However, according to God's plan the Messiah's death on a Roman cross was the beginning of life and hope. **The Messiah's glory came not from overthrowing the oppressive Roman Empire, but from dying to save the world from their sin.** This wouldn't make sense to the disciples until after the resurrection of Jesus.

- Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. Why would Jesus would have been shocking or disheartening? Why wouldn't they have understood God's plan for Jesus?
- What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus? What cross must you bear?
- What hope does Jesus give for the Messiah's future return and glory? How is this hope still an active hope for you today?



Taste of Glory

Matthew 17:1-13

Have you ever seen the Grand Canyon or the Rocky Mountains or the expanse of the ocean? Nature is a glorious sight, even from the pictures. Our world is full of beauty and majesty. In your lifetime you cannot see it all, but you can get a taste of it.

Peter, James, and John went with Jesus to the top of a mountain. There they saw Jesus' appearance suddenly change. His face became radiant like the sun and his clothes shined like white lightening. Also, there appear Moses and Elijah, who had come down from heaven to speak with Jesus. This was a moment when they saw Jesus in all his divine glory and a heavenly affirmation of his Messiahship.

The three disciples stared in awe, never seeing anything like this before (albeit something they would see again in heaven). **Peter probably didn't know what to do, but his response was the most natural thing that came to mind—worship.**⁶⁶ That will undoubtedly be the natural response for us, too, when we see Jesus face-to-face. We will fall to our knees in worship as we gaze upon his glory and greatness.

While we're here on earth, it is possible to practice worshipping Jesus by coming before him this same way. You can humble yourself every day before his glorious presence and thank God for His greatness. God is holy, awesome, and worthy of your worship, no matter where you are you can get a taste of glory.

💬 What is the most glorious thing you have ever seen? What was your response?

💬 What did a voice in the cloud call Jesus? Where have you heard this before in Matthew?⁶⁷ Who said it? Why is it so important?

💬 Who did the disciples see in the vision on the mountain? Why would it have been Moses and Elijah with Jesus in the vision?⁶⁸ Who is the Elijah who had come again?

💬 What do you learn about Jesus in this story? How does it give you a taste of glory? How can you worship him in glory today?

⁶⁶ The text says their response was fear, but it was a holy awe. Worship can be great fear of something that is wonderful.

⁶⁷ cf. 3:17

⁶⁸ Moses and Elijah were two of the great prophets God used to save and speak to his people in the past. Both of them, like Jesus, suffered rejection by God's people. Both were expected to return to inaugurate the Messianic age and their appearance here proclaims Jesus as the Messiah.



Small Seed

Matthew 17:14-21

Have you ever been given a job that you had the skills for, but for whatever reason you just could do the job? It just didn't matter how skilled or training you were you. That can be frustrating and disheartening.

Jesus disciples felt that in today's story. A desperate father came to Jesus disciples pleading him to heal his son who had a demon. The demon made his son mute, deaf, and suffer terribly. How painful and shameful this must have been for the father. The boy needed deliverance. The man brought the boy to Jesus and Jesus healed him.

The disciples, although they had been given the skills and power to heal people from Jesus,⁶⁹ could not heal the boy. They were stunned and ashamed, so they came to Jesus and asked why they couldn't heal the man.

Jesus was amazed at their little faith and the lack of faith of their entire generation.⁷⁰
These disciples and crowds have been with Jesus a few years and still they did not believe God nor believe the marvelous things God could do among them.

Both the father and the disciples did what we should do when our faith is lacking—turn to God to for help. We learn in Mark's version of this story that the boy's father was also struggling with his own faith. He said to Jesus, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, 'I do believe; help my unbelief.'" (Mark 9:22-24)

💬 Have you ever found yourself in the shoes of this father or the disciples? What do you feel when you are in their shoes?

💬 What is faith? What kind of faith is Jesus referring to here?⁷¹ How do even demons have faith? (James 2:19) How does faith please God? (Hebrews 11:6)

💬 Who is someone you know who has great faith? What makes their faith move mountains?

💬 How can you increase your faith? (see 2 Corinthians 5:7; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 10:17) How can you ask God to increase your faith this week?

⁶⁹ cf. 10:1-4

⁷⁰ cf. 6:30; 8:24-26; 14:29-32; 16:6-8, 11-12

⁷¹ Note: There is a difference between saving faith and serving faith, but they both believe God.



Coin in the Fish

Matthew 17:24-27

Taxes. It is easy to complain about having to pay them. It is easy to point fingers at the government or establishment wondering what they are doing with your money. Grumbling about paying taxes isn't a new thing, the Jews detested and resented paying taxes to Romans, even if it was to keep up their temple.

A tax collector asked Peter, if Jesus paid taxes too. Jesus had a growing reputation of being a social non-conformer. Peter said, "Of course he pays them." There was no question in Peter's mind that Jesus disrespected civil authorities or was a tax evader.

Peter went on to pay his temple tax. When he returned to Jesus he began a discussion with Peter about it, "So Peter, what do you think about paying taxes?"

Jesus talked a lot about money. It is interesting that Jesus, King of the Universe, isn't put off by paying taxes to the kings of the earth. Jesus by his heavenly position was exempt from earthly taxes,⁷² but while living on earth he paid his dues. Jesus picked his battles and this one he didn't lose any sweat over.

In one of the most interesting miracles in the Bible, Jesus sent Peter on a fishing trip that would provide him with a fish and a coin, all in one. We are not told whether Peter went fishing or whether he succeeded in catching a fish with a coin in its mouth. The point of the story was not the miracle, but Jesus' attitude. **Jesus was generous and respected those God had placed over him.**

- As you listened to Jesus and Peter's conversation, what did you notice? Were you drawn to the conversation about taxes? Or to Jesus' words about children being free? Or Jesus' desire not to give offense?
- As you consider Jesus in this passage, what do you feel? How do you react to him?
- How does Jesus help you to talk about things that are important and not important? What is your attitude to be in both?

⁷² cf. 12:5-6



True Greatness

Matthew 18:1-6; 19:13-15

As kids we strive to be the world's greatest sports star, showman or entrepreneur. We are told from a young age that we can do anything we put our mind to. As we grow older we realize that only a select few gain the title of "Great", while the rest of us remain average. Yet as we grow older our pride still wants to be known as great.

It was no different with Jesus disciples. In fact, they asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Certainly, more than one of them was hoping that Jesus would say his name.

Instead, Jesus gave a rather odd answer that runs contrary to human logic or practice. Before answering he called to himself a child and used the child as his object lesson. Looking at the disciples with the child next to him, he said, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Did Jesus mean that we are to be immature or innocent like a child? No. Of course not. In the order of humanity, a child is at the bottom. A child is under grown-up authority, dependent and powerless. Yet Jesus uses a child as the example of greatness. **True greatness is to be like a child accepting the lower status (under God) and treating the least prominent as the most important.**

Humility is unnatural. We gravitate towards pride because it puffs up our head to think we are rather smart, strong, and self-sufficient. Maybe compared to someone we are, but compared to the wisdom and power of God, we are quite puny. Only those with childlike faith admit that they're not as smart or great as God and simply do what he says.

💬 What do you learn about humility from the smartest man ever to live? (Read Proverbs 3; 25-27) What does humility look like? Why is humility so great?

💬 Why did Jesus love children so much? Why would Jesus use a child as an example of humility and faith?⁷³

💬 What are the consequences of pride? How have you seen pride remove God from the throne in your life? How can you grow to be more like a child?

⁷³ cf. 20:27; 23:11-12



Radical Amputation

Matthew 18:7-9

I have a friend named Darrell. When he was younger he had an accident that caused him to have his leg amputated. He now has a prosthetic leg that he hobbles around on, but he doesn't complain much about it. If you'd ask him he'd prefer to have a real leg to a plastic one.

Jesus knows the struggles we face in life. While he was on earth he endured pain, sorrow, loss, even temptation. He was able to endure it without sinning, but that doesn't mean he did not feel the struggle. He did. He empathizes deeply with those who have to endure temptation.⁷⁴

Jesus gave some straight talk about temptation. In fact, he got serious, if not drastic. He said, "If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away." He went on to say the same about the eye. Did he literally mean to amputate parts of your body? No. If that were true the prosthetic business would be booming. Jesus was exaggerating to make a point. Hands and eyes don't cause someone to sin nor was Jesus into self-mutilation, but he was into radically removing hinderances to sin. It was as if he said, "If temptation is causing you to sin, then get at the heart of it before it eventually kills you."

Jesus knows sin is like a deadly cancer. It is serious and must be treated seriously. Temptation in itself is not sin, but it leads to sin. To avoid sinning we must avoid being trapped by the temptation. But the truth is, we often do very foolish things when it comes to temptation. We make choices that bring us dangerously close to sinning. We may think we're safe because we don't plan on doing anything wrong. Or we may think we're strong enough to resist temptation.

Jesus loves us so much that he warns us of the dangers of temptation. He himself knows the full weight of temptation and the difficulty of enduring them.⁷⁵ While he doesn't promise to help us be free of temptation, he does give us the wisdom and strength to amputate it before it causes damage to our soul.

💬 Why isn't temptation a sin? How does temptation lead to sin?

💬 Why would Jesus use such a gruesome and drastic examples when talking about temptation and sin?

💬 What are some temptations that you need to take seriously and avoid when they come?

⁷⁴ Hebrews 4:14-16

⁷⁵ see 4:1-11



99

Matthew 18:10-14

In Chad, my family is familiar with sheep. The people we live amongst are shepherd and many own sheep, camels or cattle. Often we will see a shepherd boy leading his flock from one grazing land to another. This can hold up the one or two cars traveling down that particular road as there are no fences in Chad.

The job of a shepherd is not easy. They are responsible for every sheep. They have and know a name for each in their flock. They care for their sheep day and night. They must lead the sheep to clean later and fresh grass each day. This can take all day as sheep are slow. At the end of the day the shepherd will check each sheep for wounds. During the night, he protect the sheep from predators and from themselves. Sheep aren't smart animals nor do they care well for themselves. If a sheep falls a shepherd has to pick it up or if it gets lost he has to go find it leaving the other sheep vulnerable.

Jesus told a story about a lost sheep to show how much he cares for us. If even one of us wanders off, he'll come looking for that lost sheep. We're that important to him.

Just one person's salvation is valuable to Jesus.

This story give you only a snapshot of how much Jesus values you. You are created by God. He designed you before your birth. He made you in his image. If you are one of his flock he knows your name. You cannot possibly measure the value of your life to God. It is priceless. That's why some would say God's love for you is so reckless.

- 💬 Why does the Bible often refer to people as sheep? Who is the shepherd? Why is this image so endearing?
- 💬 What does it say about the shepherd that he would leave the 99? How have you seen God pursue you?
- 💬 What is the value of one human life to God?⁷⁶ Why do we disbelieve that we valuable to God sometimes? How can you remind yourself of your value to God even if you don't believe it?

⁷⁶ cf. 10:29-31; Psalm 139; Colossians 3:12; Zephaniah 3:17; Ephesians 3:16-21



Sweet and Sour Relationships

Matthew 18:15-20

“It’s your fault,” she says. “No it’s your fault,” he says. Have you ever been hurt by the words or actions of someone? Or have you observed someone making a mess of their life and you wondered how you should intervene?

Relationships are necessary, but they aren’t easy. People close to you can make mistakes—they hurt your feelings, break promises, or forget things dear to you. Sometimes you may think it would be easier to just be by alone. But that’s not the way God designed you. Flaws and all, God created you to need one another.

Relationships can turn sour and messy, but Jesus gives really good and practical relationship advice. He is incredibly wise. If you choose to follow his advice your relationships can become quite sweet, deep and strong.

Jesus says if you see someone close to you in a mess or sin, you should go to them one-on-one and explain why their behavior was wrong and encourage them to make it right. Going one-on-one is an important first step. Most times the issue can be resolved here and you do not have to go public, which could cause a lot of shame or embarrassment. It is also here that you can gain a good friend that respects you would choose to help them in a difficult situation

Now in the case that your one-on-one discussion is not effective, Jesus has a backup plan. Don’t ignore your friend or the situation, but give him a another chance, this time bringing with you another friend who wants to help. Still if their is no change then the issue to be brought before the church.

We have all seen this sour good relationships, but it doesn’t have to. In fact, it can be sweet and powerful for relationships in the church, especially when the goal is to love deeply and pray fervently for your sinning brother to repent and change. Often the result is that you become the friend for your friend that you want them to be for you if you were in their same situation too.

- ☞ Why are relationships necessary, but not easy? How much more difficult would it be to live life on your own?
- ☞ Have you known a friend to get themselves into a messy situation when you needed to intervene? How did you help? How did it turn out for your relationship?
- ☞ Have you ever had a friend that helped you when you got yourself into a mess or sinful situation? How did they handle it? Did you friendship remain sour or did you gain a deeper friend?



Grudges

Matthew 18:21-35

I can never forgive you.

Those are harsh words. Maybe you have heard those words. Or maybe you have said those words. Certainly you've felt those words at times.

It can be excruciatingly hard to forgive someone who has hurt you or owes you a debt or an apology. What is worse is when someone repeatedly hurts you after you have repeatedly forgiven them. Patience can run thin. Old wounds hurt afresh. And what happens too often in relationships is the hurt turns into a grudge, then the grudge turns into revenge or unforgiveness. **The grudge ends up hurting you more than someone else hurt you.**

Jesus invites us to consider another alternative—God's heart. He encourages us to greater generosity and largeness of heart in our relationships. He illustrates his heart through a story. He talks about a king who forgave a servant from a debt that was impossible for him to payback, even if he had many lifetimes to do so. The servant cried mercy and the king took pity on the servant in a move of extraordinary mercy.

Soon after the servant departed, he found a friend—a fellow servant—who owed him a puny debt, one that could be easily paid off. The freshly forgiven servant strangled the fellow servant who cried mercy and treated him harshly, much more harshly than the king had treated him.

When the king learned how his servant had been so wicked towards his fellow servant it anger him that he forgave his servant so much, yet the servant did not forgive much at all. It was like a slap in the king's face. The servant could not forgive himself of the huge debt he owed the king, yet he could forgive his friend who simply needed a little more time to pay him back.

Jesus' story is truly about you and God. It's about God forgiving you and you forgiving others from his heart. The struggle to be patient and forgiving are common to all, except God. **God is a forgiving God. Never can you out do his forgiveness.** Jesus models this and talks about it. His mission was to show God's extraordinary forgiveness.

- How is Jesus story a picture of God and man? Are you startled by the kings initial generosity and final judgement?
- What do you desire in your relationships? In what ways would you like to be generous or forgiving? Can you think of concrete examples in your life?
- What do you learn about God's extraordinary forgiveness in this story? What do you learn about your own need for forgiveness? Or you need to show forgiveness to others?



Divorce

Matthew 19:1-12

People today are less likely to marry and more likely to divorce. People instead are avoiding marriage because of the potential pain of divorcing.

While marriage is beautiful, divorce is ugly. Marriage is like gluing two pieces of plywood together and divorce is like ripping those pieces apart. When the wood is ripped apart it cannot be as it was as chunks of the wood are broken and damaged. Every family has been touched by the damage of divorce.

God loves marriage. From the beginning of time,⁷⁷ God had marriage as a picture of his eternal love. In his perfect plan is that when a man and a woman get married, they'll stay together forever. In fact, God thinks so much of marriage that he says married couples aren't just two people anymore—they become one.

God hates divorce. The religious leaders sought to debate Jesus by bringing up the case of Moses allowing divorce in the law for the case of adultery.⁷⁸ Jesus didn't take the bait and debate. He ended all questions by calling divorce deplorable and incompatible with God's purpose in marriage. The divorce law was a concession to deal with the result of sin, not an expression of God's original intention. Divorce might be necessary, but it could never be good.

God created us for relationship and designed marriage so we wouldn't have to live alone. That's why God gave Adam a partner in the garden of Eden. Eve became Adam's wife. They got into trouble, made mistakes, and were punished for disobeying God. But in spite of all that, they remained together under the covenant God established for them. Before marrying we must ask ourselves if we are in it "til death do us part."

- ☞ What makes marriage so beautiful and divorce so ugly? What is God's intention for marriage? How does marriage show us God intention for relationships, even between us and him?
- ☞ What is the alternative to marriage given in the text? Why isn't this an easy alternative?
- ☞ What do you love about marriages? What do you hate about marriage? How can you promote God's intention for marriage?

⁷⁷ see Genesis 2:24; cf. 1:27

⁷⁸ Deuteronomy 24



Heaven Ain't for Sale

Matthew 19:16-30

You are rich. It's overwhelming. It's humbling. It's shocking. If your family income is \$10,000 a year, you are wealthier than 84 percent of the world. If it's \$50,000 or more a year, you make more than 99 percent of the world. Even the poorest among you are richer than most of the world.

Americans have a horribly unhealthy view of—and relationship with—money. This isn't a new thing nor an American concept. All throughout history people have gravitated towards loving money and their stuff.

Jesus met a man who wanted to know what he needed to *do* to get to heaven. He did his best to keep the law. He also had everything by the world's standard, but according to Jesus he did not have *everything*. He wanted into the kingdom of heaven. When asked to sell everything he owned he grieved the thought. He was ready to write a check and buy his way into heaven if he could. He put money before God. God and money cannot occupy the heart at the same time. When it came to the 10 Commandments, the rich man was forgetting the first two commandments.

Jesus' disciples by comparison had left everything to follow Jesus. They left family, career, and status. They put Jesus first. And Jesus promised them greater joy than anything in the world promised—eternal joy and fulfillment. **Having Jesus was more than enough, in fact, he's all you need.** Money fades, but Jesus doesn't.

Jesus said it's not about what you do, but it is about who you follow. Only Jesus did it all. What the rich man needed most was standing right in front of him. It wasn't a better paying job, a bigger house, a fuller garage, more riches, or a bigger retirement. He needed Jesus. Only Jesus fulfills the deep longings of the heart. Only Jesus guarantees riches that last beyond the grave. Only Jesus secures a sure eternity. And God isn't stingy, he blesses and rewards over the top. Heaven is proof of that.

- ☞ Why would selling everything free the man to follow Jesus? What are the riches you are storing up? Is there anything that you are possessive about, which gets in the way of following Jesus more freely?
- ☞ Jesus is teaching the disciples about the difference between worldly values and God's values. Imagine yourself among them, listening to Jesus. How do his words affect you?
- ☞ Jesus promises that everyone who follows him will receive fulfillment and joy. What would you like to ask Jesus to give you today?



It's Not Fair

Matthew 20:1-16

“It’s not fair! I did more and they got the same reward as me!” How often I have heard my children complain like this to me and their siblings. It is tempting to respond with the common parental response is, “Well, life not fair!”

I must admit that as an adult, I can have a similar complaint. I can be just as childish and quick to compare what I have or have no compared to those around me. When I compare myself with a criminal or non-church goer, I can show the same lack generosity and mercy.

Jesus tells a powerful a story about an owner of a vineyard who hires workers at different hours of the day (early morning, afternoon, and late afternoon). When evening came, he paid them for their work. What is shocking is that he pays them all the same amount, whether they worked all-day in the scorching sun or only worked a little in the cool part of the day. Those who worked all day cried out, “It’s not fair,” not because they were underpaid, but because in the owners generosity he overpaid others.

Jesus is pushing a button. His story is meant to push your response towards what is fair. He wants to draw out your response to the mercy of God—his fairness and generosity. In the story, God is the vineyard’s owner and we see how he treats each person who comes to work in the kingdom. **God’s kingdom is not a place of competition. He doesn’t play favorites. He is generous to all.**

Jesus repeats a maxim that seems more like an oxymoron—*the last will be first and the first will be last*.⁷⁹ Some work hard all their life to finish first, but others cross the finish at the last minute. Both receive the same reward. But what’s more amazing is that God would reward anyone. No one is deserving of God’s generosity. Thank God, he’s not fair or we’d all still be lost rather than last.

- Imagine yourself in this story: hanging about on a hot day, waiting for work, needing the money. How do you feel when the landowner comes along and hires your labour? How might you feel if you were one of the last to be hired?
- And when the working day is over, and you're queueing up to be paid. How do you feel when everyone gets the same pay?
- Everyone who comes to God is treated with the same fairness and the same generosity. And this is true for you: God accepts you with whatever you have to offer. What do you have to offer, what do you *want* to offer to God, right now?

⁷⁹ cf. 19:30; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30



Number 1, 2 & 3

Matthew 20:20-28

We live in a competitive world. Everyone wants to be the first. Sports teams aren't satisfied with being anything other than on top. The truth is, only one team or competitor can hold that position. The rest must settle for less than first.

There is an organization that has a different message than what the world says. They are called I Am Second. Their vision is to *seek a world where people become second, serving and loving each other as they put Jesus first*. There aren't many organizations or movements like this in the world.

Wanting to be first isn't something new. The mother of brothers James and John asked Jesus if her boys could be his right-hand men in his kingdom, which she this is here and now. What mother wouldn't want her children to have the best and brightest future. However, Jesus knew that they missed the point of his life's purpose completely. He didn't come to be served or to give out ranks to others. He came to serve others.

Jesus modeled and taught that others went first. He intentionally put God and others before himself. He said some very backwards things like, "The greatest among you will be your servant," "The last will be first, and the first will be last," and "The one who is least among you all . . . is the greatest".⁸⁰ These sayings endear us to Jesus because he actually lived it. He was selfless, not selfish.

If Jesus is your number one, then your priorities will shift to look like his—looking out for Jesus, others, and then look out for yourself. It doesn't mean that you aren't looking out for your own interests or joy at all, but that you aren't so focused on self that you miss Jesus and others.

💬 How is the way that Jesus lived his life so different than how the world lives their lives? Why do we respect people who are selfless rather than selfish?

💬 How would you prioritize: Jesus, others, you? Should these priorities be viewed as a list or concentric circles? Why?

💬 What are some ways you can serve God and others around you? How does serving others bring joy to you?

⁸⁰ Matthew 23:11; Matthew 20:16; and Luke 9:48



Two Blind Men

Matthew 20:29-34

Imagine not being able to see your favorite flower bloom in spring or see snow-capped mountains glisten as the sunsets behind them. Imagine not being able to look at the ocean blue or enjoy the vibrant colors of a rainbow in the lushest jungle. This is the suffering of the blind.

When Jesus departed from the city of Jericho he met two blind men. Although they could not see Jesus, they heard him pass by and knew his voice. Moreover, they knew who Jesus was and what he could do for them. They cried out, “Master, have mercy! Mercy, Son of David.” That short and simple cry showed their belief in Jesus as the promised Messiah and their only hope of salvation.

Desperate people do desperate things. These blind men were had suffered without sight and were desperate to see. The good news of suffering is that it brings people to the end of themselves. Suffering brings them to the place of honesty, which is the place of desperation, which is the place of faith, which is the place of freedom.

The great tragedy isn't that these two men were blind. The greater tragedy is that the crowd lacked compassion and didn't notice the two men suffering. **None is so blind as the one that will not see.** This did not stop the blind men from crying out to Jesus again. They saw Jesus more clearly than anyone in the crowd.

Jesus heard the cry of the two men, he had compassion on them, and he opened their blind eyes. And with their new eyes they didn't run to the mountains, ocean, or flower garden, they followed behind Jesus and beheld his glory.

The great miracle is that Jesus hears those who are suffering, he has compassion, and he opens blind eyes. Have you experience the miracle of sight?

Imagine being born blind. What would you miss not seeing?

Why is spiritual blindness worse than physical blindness? In what ways have you been spiritually blind?

How do you see Jesus? How do you see Jesus in Psalm 82? How do you see yourself in this Psalm?



KING'S WELCOMING

A Royal Welcome

Matthew 21:1-11

Roll out the red carpet. Blare the trumpets. The king has come. “All hail the king!” Can you picture the scene? Can you imagine yourself in the crowd getting a peak at royalty? Can you feel the thrill in your bones?

It was Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.⁸¹ It started like any ordinary day, but it ended up being extraordinary. As Jesus entered the holy city, crowds lined the streets, they waved palm branches and laid down their cloaks. They honored Jesus like a king. It was a royal welcome. It must have made Jesus smile, at least for a moment. He did not frown upon the worship, but he knew in his heart their praise was misguided.

While the crowd got his title correct, they didn't have correct timing. Jesus is a King—the King of kings, but he did not first come to rule and reign as king upon the earth. That time would come, but not yet. The crowds wanted a king—a rescuer. They were tired of the Romans breathing down their neck. They were fed up with paying tribute to Caesar. Jesus was their new man. He fit their idea of a messiah.

Jesus had done so much to deserve praise. He had nothing more to prove. In just three short years, he showed that he is the Messiah. The crowd recognized it.

Behind the scenes there were characters that weren't impressed with Jesus. Despite all the healing, all the miracles, all the powerful, all the wise teachings, the religious leaders said, “Eh. He's no prophet. He's a blasphemer. He's no teacher. He's leading our people astray. He's no messiah. He's a maniac.”

It was the start of the worst week of Jesus life. The same crowd that shouted, “Save us, King Jesus!” Would shout, “Crucify him!” as they crowned him with thorns, beat him, and hung him on a criminals cross. **Jesus would indeed save the crowds from something much greater than the Romans; he would save them from their sins.**

💬 What does Psalm 118 celebrate? How does this connect to Jesus and this scene? Why would the Jews want to be rescued again?

💬 How is Jesus both King and Savior? How did he prove both?

💬 What makes Jesus your King and Savior? What song of praise do you have for him today?

⁸¹ Today we celebrate this day on Palm Sunday, which is the Sunday before Easter



Ninja Kick

Matthew 21:12-17

Chuck Norris's signature move was a "Roundhouse Kick" to the head. He did it to almost every criminal as Walker Texas Ranger. Ralph Macchio's signature move was the "Crane Kick. It was what he used to take down the Cobra Kai as the Karate Kid.

It was the beginning of the Passover week he entered the temple. he saw people buying and selling. This would have been normal as vendors often sold animals for the sacrifice, but this day was particularly different. The priest gave permission to additional vendors to turn the temple into a huge flea market to take advantage of the crowds that swelled during the Passover in Jerusalem. It was a rather lucrative event for the religious establishment.

We don't like to think of Jesus as a ninja, but enraged he kicked over the tables. We only see it once, but the "Table Flip" becomes his signature move. He made no apology for his actions.

It may shock some people that Jesus was so violent and angry. Yet why did he respond this way? Isn't it said that a gentle answer turns away wrath?⁸² Yes, but he was jealous for God and his holy place. The temple marked the presence of God. People were to gather there for worship and prayer. The market crowded out the temple's primary function—to draw people to God. They were padding their pockets when they should have been purifying their hearts.

Jesus act was an act of cleaning up the temple and purifying the people's worship in readiness for the great day of the Lord. This, together with his healing of the blind and the lame created quite a scene. It caught the eyes of the religious leaders negatively, but for many in the crowd they recognized him and hailed him as the Messiah.⁸³ Ironically, Jesus, God in the flesh was being worshiped in his temple.

💬 How does Malachi 3:1–4 and Zechariah 14:21 helps us to understand Jesus' signature move in the temple?

💬 How is Jesus' anger justified? How does it help you to understand the character of God?

💬 In what ways are you jealous for God? How does sin make you mad?

⁸² Proverbs 15:1

⁸³ Cf. Psalm 8:2



Fig Tree & Faith

Matthew 21:18-22

My grandparents had an apple tree in their backyard. For years it produced beautiful plump apples that my grandma would make a yummy crisp. Just thinking about it makes my mouth water. However, one year the tree produced small rotten apples and the following spring the tree withered and died. The following year it became a stump.

Jesus passed by a fig tree that had beautiful leaves but no figs. It was barren. It appeared to have promise, rather it produced disappointment, especially for Jesus and his disciples who were hungry for breakfast. In response, Jesus cursed the tree and said, “Lazy tree. May you never bear fruit again.” Miraculously and immediately the tree withered and died. The disciples marveled (as do I as I read the story).

Jesus may have appeared angry at a fig tree, but he wasn’t actually. He was making a point about bearing fruit in your life. The barren tree resembled the empty worship and faith of those Jesus had met in the temple the day before. They would become like a stump where there once was a great tree that produced abundant fruit.⁸⁴

Jesus was announcing the shift of God’s dwelling place and presence from a temple made with hands to human hearts. Ever since the time of Moses the Israelites associated God’s presence with the tent in the wilderness, then Solomon’s temple. The *withering* of the tree is then a visible pointer to the fate of the temple which Jesus predicted and he would erect a new temple in which he was the cornerstone.⁸⁵

Although, Jesus was Immanuel—God with us—Israel missed their Messiah. They wanted Jesus to rescue them from Roman tyranny, but they didn’t want him to change the system that symbolically pointed to Jesus from the beginning. **Jesus was their life-giving vine and without faith in him they would be empty, whither and die.**⁸⁶

- How does the story of the fig tree compare to Israel, the temple and their worship or faith? What connection to faith and worship (or prayer) have according to Jesus?
- What is the significance of the shifting focus of God’s dwelling place and presence from a temple made of hands to a human heart? How does that affect you?
- How does abiding in Jesus bear fruit in your life? What does that fruit look like?

⁸⁴ see Isaiah 6:13

⁸⁵ cf. 23:38; 24:2. The temple would be utterly destroyed in 40 years and never be rebuilt.

⁸⁶ John 15:5-8



By What Authority

Matthew 21:23-27

It may seem rude to answer a question with a question. When you do it's often because you either do not know the answer and want to avoid embarrassment, or you are being interrogated or debated and want to avoid giving a direct response.

Interestingly, when asked by what authority Jesus went into the temple kicking over tables and cursing a fig tree he responds unashamedly with a question. It wasn't that Jesus was avoiding embarrassment, rather he was avoiding a direct response because he knew a debate with the religious establishment would go nowhere because of their deep unbelief and growing hatred for Jesus.

Jesus drew the attention of many for his provocative actions and an official response from him was inevitable. His actions implicitly claimed an authority which threatened the supremacy of the religious leaders and their religious system. Therefore, the chief priests and the elders made it their prerogative to kick off Jesus' integration.

Jesus refused to be lured in. Instead, he threw out a question to their question. It was a fair question. He asked about the origin of John's baptism. This question pinned the leaders into a corner. They wanted to deny Jesus' authority, but in order to do so they would have to deny that John was a messenger of God.⁸⁷ They wouldn't dare, so they risked embarrassment rather than embrace truth.

Jesus' silence called them to think carefully about their stance on his authority compared to John. In essence, Jesus' question defended his own authority. Jesus knew the answer to both their question and his own. This wasn't the first time people acknowledged Jesus was acting on special authority.⁸⁸ It was similar to Jesus asking his disciples, "who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:13, 15) In case there was any confusion he would soon share with them the truth about his authority.⁸⁹

💬 Why would the religious leaders question Jesus' authority? Why wouldn't they accept Jesus authority?

💬 Where did Jesus authority come from? Why is this so important?

💬 What authority does Jesus have in your life? What authority has he even you?

⁸⁷ see 11:7–19; 17:11–13

⁸⁸ cf. 7:28; 9:1–7; Mark 1:21–28; John 1:12; 5:27; 10:18; 17:2

⁸⁹ cf. 28:18



The Tale of Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

Surely you are aquatinted with the scenario where a mother asked her child, “Son, will you sweep the kitchen.” And the son responds, “Aw, mom, do I have to?” What parent hasn’t pleaded with their child to complete a chore and what child hasn’t complained about doing it?

As a son there were chores that I did not like, but if I didn’t do them there would be some consequences. I remember one time I decided my chores could wait but playing with my friends couldn’t. When I came home afterwards my parents put me on my chores immediately, but doubled the load and I lost the privilege of playing with my friends for a week. I learned my lesson, even if it meant dragging my feet to wash the dishes or mow the lawn the next time.

Jesus shared a story was about two sons who were asked to work in their father’s vineyard. The first son said he would not go, but later repented. The second son said he would go, but didn’t. When Jesus asked which son did as his father asked the crowd responded correctly, the first son.

This story is not just about doing as you are told. In the story the father is God and Jesus describes what God is looking for in his children. The point of the story is that anyone who repents can enter the kingdom of God. The consequences of not doing what the Father says are more severe than not completely a simple chore. The religious leaders were play with eternity.

It is better to admit your lack of willingness to do what you’re told and repent, then to lie about your willingness and disobey entirely. The simple story illustrates the difference between saying and doing and indicates that **God is more impressed by our willingness to obey than by our empty promises.**

God is a loving and forgiving God. To understand this all you have to do is look at how Jesus forgave crooks and loved sinners willing to repent. Jesus calls all to repent and believe.

● What is repentance? Why does God honor a repentant person?

● From what you have read in Matthew up to this point, who is Jesus referring to when he talks about the first son? What about the second son? Which son do you most resemble?

● How would you rewrite this story with a modern day twist?



The Wicked Renters

Matthew 21:33-46

Have you ever heard it said, “A prophet is not accepted in his hometown?” This proverb has its roots with Jesus who was rejected in Nazareth,⁹⁰ but it also refers to a history of Jews rejecting their prophets.⁹¹ Instead, they ignored and punished their prophet’s God-given message calling them to turn from their sins and to turn back to God.

Jesus went on to share a story about a landowner who rented out his vineyard. The harvest time came the landowner sent servants to visit the vineyard, but when the renters saw the servants they harassed, rejected and killed them. The landowner sent another group of servants to the vineyard, but the same wicked thing happened. In third attempt, the landowner sent his own son thinking they would accept him, but sadly the renters saw the son, threw him out, and killed him too.

In response to the story Jesus asked, “When the landowner comes what will he do to his renters?” The crowd responded in unison, “They will kill them!” They were spot on. However, the story is not so much about the landowners revenge and judgement on the wicked renters as much as it is a story Jesus shares about himself.

Like the landowners son, Jesus would be harassed, rejected and killed as God’s Son. And God’s kingdom will be taken away from those who reject Jesus. Yet those who believe in him will be welcomed them live in his kingdom—the vineyard that belongs to God. The religious leaders perceived correctly that Jesus was speaking about them being the rejectors compared to the wicked renters, but they stubbornly held on to their disbelief.

💬 How is this story similar to Isaiah’s story? (see Isaiah 51:1-7) How was the rejected prophet always a part of God’s story?

💬 What kind of fruit is God looking for from his people?⁹² What fruit didn’t Jesus not see in the religious leaders?

💬 What fruit in your life demonstrates belief that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁹⁰ Luke 4:24

⁹¹ cf. 23:30-37

⁹² cf. 3:8, 10; 7:15–20; 12:33–37; 13:8, 26; 21:18–20



The Invitation

Matthew 22:1-14

I was once invited to attend the banquet of a wealth business man and politician at the fancy golf course he owned in West Virginia. I felt a little outside of my league as a college student working as a glorified gopher in the office of that business man, but it felt a little like royalty nonetheless.

Jesus was a masterful storyteller and he told a story about a king who sent out an invitation for a city to attend a wedding party for his son at his palace. Many ignored and refused the invitation. There king then sent out another round of messengers to announce the meal was ready, but the people shrugged their shoulders and went about the business of their day.

The story then becomes quite bizarre as some with nothing better to do murdered the messengers and in response the king sends a military campaign to ransack the city while the dinner gets cold! To burn their city may seem like a very extreme reaction to a refused dinner invitation. The story is imaginary, but symbolic. Israel's refusal (in its leaders) to respond to God's call through Jesus would lead to the destruction of their city, Jerusalem, to which Jesus had come in order to be rejected and killed.⁹³

The king represents God. This story does not depict him as a tyranny or cruel king, but as one who loves to celebrate with all people and invites them to feast with him. Not everyone thinks that the invitation is so grand. In the end, God is a gracious king who invites the least likely street dwellers to attend the banquet. The point of the story is similar to the previous stories—**People who accept God's invitation to join his family will be part of the kingdom of God.**

One day Jesus will host a heavenly banquet.⁹⁴ It will be a celebration you don't want to miss—a celebration of celebrations. However, only those who have accepted his invitation and believe on his name will be in attendance. Will your name be on the guest list?

💬 What is the fanciest party you've been invited to?

💬 What does it mean to you that the King of the Universe invites you to join him at his celebration? Why do some people ignore the invitation?

💬 Write a thank you note to God for his lavish invitation?

⁹³ cf. 16:21

⁹⁴ Revelation 19:6-9



The Tax Trap

Matthew 22:15-22

Have you ever had a mouse in the house? It can be unnerving to know there is a little critter creeping around munching on your crumbs.

I remember working at a camp one summer and my cabin was infested with mice. I went to the store and bought peanut butter and a large sticky trap. That night I placed the trap near to a place I thought the mice were entering the cabin. In the morning, I woke up and found more than a half-dozen mice glued to the trap. That took care of that problem.

The religious leaders thought Jesus was a nuisance like having a mouse in the house. They conjured up clever ways to try and catch him, trap him or get rid of him. On this occasion they tried to trap Jesus in a political religious conversation. They came to Jesus with a mix religious students and the king's followers. They began with flattery, gushing over his teaching and lack of bigheadedness, then they asked their question, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar?" It was an interesting question. A loaded question, of course. Who likes paying taxes, right? Yet, depending on how Jesus answered the question he could be viewed as siding with the Roman government or rebelling against the government. Either way he was trapped and the audience was waiting to hear how he'd answer.

Jesus knew the motive of their hearts and wasn't going to take the bait. He called out their game playing and trap building. He asked them for a coin and then asked, "Who's name and image is on this coin?" It was Caesar's. Therefore Jesus responded, "If it's Caesar's they pay the tax to him." By responding this way Jesus distanced himself from the zealots who were against paying taxes and he exposed their hypocrisy, since no patriotic Jew should have been carrying this coin, with its idolatrous portrait of the emperor and its inscription giving him the title 'Son of God'.

Jesus was no mouse in the house or nuisance, he was the Messiah—the image and Son of God in the flesh. There is a lot to learn from his response. He didn't make a big deal about which king was to be honored. He respected the authority of the Caesar, God, and himself

- ☞ Why did the religious leaders consider Jesus a nuisance? How did they want to trap him?
- ☞ How does Jesus demonstrate respect for both earthly and heavenly authority?
- ☞ What does it look like for you to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's?



The Afterlife Trap

Matthew 22:23-33

Everyone has an opinion about what the afterlife will be like. Some say we will be on clouds playing harps. Others think they will have their mansion in the mountains or by the lake. Some believe we become dirt.

The Sadducees took their turn trying to trap Jesus with a question about the afterlife. The problem was that they did not believe in a spiritual afterlife.⁹⁵ The Sadducees began with the law of Moses: If a two brothers live near each other and one is married but dies, then the other brother can take the widow to be his wife.⁹⁶ Culturally and legally it was possible, but then the Sadducees build on this law with a hypothetical situation that was quite farfetched, “What if the woman had seven husbands, which one would she be married to in the afterlife?”

Jesus called their bogus question by saying, “Haven’t you read the Bible?” In other words, “Where are you getting this hogwash? It was obvious they did not get it from the Bible or God. You don’t even believe in the afterlife.” His answer muzzled and amazed the crowds. The Sadducees cried because their trap was as *sad* as their name.

Through Jesus’ response we learn valuable information about the afterlife. First, **marriage in afterlife will not be as it is on earth**. He says we will be as the angels worshipping God. Not only that, but we (the bride of Christ) will united with Christ (the bridegroom). This future resurrected life will be far richer than life as we know it now.

Second, **we will recognize other living humans in the afterlife**. Jesus went to the law himself to the moment God introduced himself to Moses, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”⁹⁷ He referred to them in the present tense because they were still alive and knew them. Death has not thwarted God’s relationship with these men.

The Bible doesn’t tell us everything about the afterlife, but it does tell us all we need to know. Heaven is a place where God is and it is a place we will be known by God.

💬 What would you like to know about the afterlife? What is our fascination with it? What do you learn about the afterlife from Jesus?

💬 Why does death for the believer equal a richer life than than you can enjoy on earth?

⁹⁵ cf. Acts 23:8

⁹⁶ Deuteronomy 25:5-10

⁹⁷ cf. Exodus 3:6



The Most Important Commandment Trap

Matthew 22:34-40

What is the most important rule in life? This was a question asked of Jesus by the Pharisees. It wasn't a new question. The Pharisees and Sadducees had debated the answer for centuries.⁹⁸ Of the 613 commandments in the law there are a lot of important ones to choose from.⁹⁹ Obeying all of them was laborious, so the religious experts like the Pharisees and Sadducees spent a lot of time dividing the commands into important and not so important so one could focus on the most important commandments.

There is just one problem—all the commands are important. If only one command is broken then you are guilty of breaking them all.¹⁰⁰

In response, Jesus quoted the Hebrew *Shema*,¹⁰¹ which was one of the most well known and repeated Scripture to the average Jew. It was their confession of faith. Therefore, Jesus affirms that the greatest commandment is to love God completely, deeply, and intimately. And out of that love for God comes a natural love for people.¹⁰²

So Jesus summarizes the 613 commands into 2—love God and others. Love is the *modus operandi* of God and man. Without love it is impossible to obey God's commands. Love is what the law is about.

Jesus was getting at the heart. The religious leaders did not love Jesus, in fact they hated him and wanted to kill him. Ultimately, it revealed their lack of love for God.¹⁰³ And Jesus' response threw the ball back into the Pharisees hands, "Do you love God and me like this?"

💬 What other commands might you or others consider as very important?

💬 What does love for God look like? What does love for others look like? How are the love loves intertwined?

💬 What does a lack of love for others reveal about your love for God?

⁹⁸ Not too mention the two groups didn't like each other, however, since they were part of the same Jewish family they related to each other as frenemies.

⁹⁹ Of the laws 248 were "do's" and 365 were "do not's".

¹⁰⁰ James 2:10

¹⁰¹ Deuteronomy 6:4; shema comes from the Hebrew word "hear" or "listen up".

¹⁰² Leviticus 19:18; cf. 1 John 3:10-18; 4:7-21; Romans 13:8-10

¹⁰³ John 8:42



The Messiah Trap

Matthew 22:41-46

The way you phrase a question is important. Some questions are asked out of curiosity or feedback, while others can be posed as an attack.

Earlier in Matthew, Jesus asked the disciple, “Who do you say that I am?”¹⁰⁴ It was a curious question. However, when Jesus asked the question again, but this time to the Pharisees who were in an argumentative mood. They had little sympathy for Jesus or his credentials. Since they were looking for a theological debate Jesus made his question sound more theological, but actually it was a very personal question, “Whose Son is the Messiah?”

The expert responded, “The Messiah is the Son of David.” He was half-right. He was right that the Messiah would come from the line of David,¹⁰⁵ but he did not recognize (rather ignored) the Messiah was standing a few feet from him.

Therefore Jesus asked a second question about the Messiah’s connection to the first verse of Psalm 110, which David wrote. In other words, Jesus asked, “If Messiah is David’s Son, then how could he also be David’s Lord?” It was a stellar question and it only left one answer. **As God, the Messiah could be David’s Lord, and as a man he would be from David’s line.**¹⁰⁶

Many people made the connection between Jesus and David.¹⁰⁷ The experts of the law heard the crowds call Jesus the Son of David. It was true that he was legitimately born into the family of David (1:1, 20). These facts couldn’t be denied, yet they were. The experts were confused about the Messiah, whether he was the Suffering Servant or Conquering King or both. Indeed he was both. He came to suffer and die (human), but would come again to conquer his enemies and reign as King of all (divine).

💬 How is Jesus the Messiah both a Suffering Servant and Conquering King? Why are both important? How does it reveal both his humanity and divinity?

💬 Why were the leaders afraid to ask Jesus anymore questions? What truth were they afraid of? How do we make the same mistake today?

¹⁰⁴ cf. 16:15

¹⁰⁵ cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Psalm 78:68-72; Micah 5:2

¹⁰⁶ Revelation 22:16

¹⁰⁷ cf. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15.



False Concepts

Matthew 23:1-12

Have you ever been wrong? Possibly you thought you were right until someone brought you the facts that proved that you were wrong. There are two ways you can respond to this. Either you can deny the facts or you can accept the facts.

The Pharisees assumed they were right about many things. In fact, they put themselves in the place of Moses who had the highest place in their eyes, since he brought the Law of God to them. However, nobody but themselves gave the Pharisees that level of authority. **The Pharisees had a false concept of themselves and their authority.** The only authority the Pharisees had was the Scripture, but because they had elevated themselves so highly, they made everyone obey their teachings of the Scripture.

The Pharisees had a false concept of righteousness. They taught that people were to obey the law to be right with God. So they manufactured rules and ways of living, but it didn't matter if their heart was in it or not. One only needed to look the part. This doesn't mesh with Jesus teach on the heart and how God desires to clean the inside and out.¹⁰⁸ He is about practicing what he preaches.

The Pharisees had a false concept of ministry. Maybe they had good intentions when they added traditions and rules to help people obey the law, rather over time these additions multiplied burdens. They were harder on others than they were on themselves. They dictated spirituality rather than demonstrate it. Jesus came to make peoples burdens light, not heavier.¹⁰⁹ He will never ask his followers to do something he hasn't done himself.

The Pharisees had a false concept of greatness. They were all about the praise of men and position. When compared to others they looked pretty good. However, they were comparing themselves to the wrong greatness. Compared to the greatness of God they looked rather pathetic.¹¹⁰ Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. He showed that the greatest is also the least (cf. 20:26).

💬 Why would Jesus forbids the title of rabbi, father and master for his followers? How were the Pharisees into titles? What do titles communicate about what people desire?

💬 What is true greatness? What are the marks of a true spiritual leader? Which mark do you want to resemble more of this week?

¹⁰⁸ cf. vs.23-24

¹⁰⁹ cf. 11:28-30

¹¹⁰ cf. 5:16



Woes

Matthew 23:13-36

A good parent warns his children of the consequences of doing wrong. It may seem to the child that the parent is being restricting or harsh, but it is actually very loving of the parent to steer us away from evil.

When Jesus confronted the Pharisees of their wrong thinking about righteousness he cried out “woe.” A “woe” is an express of deep distress. It is hard to translate because it is a sound that describes how one feels. Jesus cried out woe, as if a truck was barreling down the highway heading straight towards his hearers, but the were blind and could not see it clearly.

Jesus shared eight “woes” that negatively paired with the positive Beatitudes he shared earlier in his Sermon on the Mount:

Beatitudes — True Righteousness (5:1-12)	Woes — False Righteousness (23:13-36)
Poor in spirit enter the kingdom (5:3)	Proud in spirit keep themselves and others out of the kingdom (23:13)
Mourners of sin are comforted (5:4)	Caused Mourning and discomfort (23:14)
Meek inherit the earth (5:5)	Proud send souls to hell (23:15; cf. 12:34; 23:33)
Hungry for holiness (5:6)	Greedy for gain (23:16-22; cf. 15:14)
Receiving mercy (5:7)	Rejecting mercy (23:23-24)
Pure in heart (5:8)	Putrid in heart (23:25-28)
Peacemakers (5:9)	Partners with Satan (23:29-33; cf. 13:38)
Persecuted (5:10-11)	Persecutors (23:29-33)

Can you see why Jesus would view the Pharisees as his enemies? He could see through their religious facade into their wicked hearts. Jesus modeled humility and servanthood, which infuriated the Pharisees. In the process, Jesus—the Light of the world—exposed their artificial faith and dark intentions for what it really was.

- ☞ How does Jesus (the Light) exposes darkness or the enemies intentions? How was Jesus trying to help the Pharisees, not hurt them?
- ☞ We can easily point fingers at the Pharisees and others, but what in your life mimics the woes of the Pharisees? What Beatitude would others say you shine in?
- ☞ What have you learned about true righteousness from Jesus talk to the Pharisees?



Weeping

Matthew 23:37-39

I have heard people cry and seen them shed tears, but the first time I saw someone weep was in Chad, Africa. A Sudanese man I knew had lost a close friend. He wept out loud. His body shook. Nothing I did or said comforted him. At first it was discomfoting, but as he continued his outward display it gave me insight into what was going on in his heart. He really felt pain and loss for his friend. He didn't hide it. **Weeping was the path towards his healing.**

After Jesus had shared tough words with the scribes and Pharisees, he lamented over Jerusalem. The God-followers of his nation rejected him as their Messiah. He wept not only over the city of Jerusalem, but the entire nation of Israel. God's people had many opportunities to respond to his mercy and salvation, but passed it by. Rather than embracing God's messengers they killed them. Jesus would be another in a long line of rejects.

It is like the tale of two brothers, one brother is a prodigal (Israel) and the other brother (Jesus) willing to do whatever it takes to save his brother. But the prodigal brother hates Jesus and rejects him. He wants nothing more than him dead. Jesus will therefore bear the same brutality as his ancestors and lay down his life so that his wicked brother can be saved. This still has profound affect on Jesus. His grief ran deep. Thus he weeps.

Jesus' lament doesn't end with sadness, but ends with hope. Jesus shared a promise. He would return and the nation would say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," which comes from the great Messianic Psalm quoted when Jesus first entered Jerusalem a few days earlier.¹¹¹ Indeed, Jesus would return and fulfill this promise. He would save Jerusalem, defeat her enemies, and restore her as Zion.¹¹²

The fact that Israel would reject her King would not thwart the redemptive plan of God. It was always a part of his plan. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords the Redeemer and Savior of the world. **He will turn weeping will turn to cries of joy.**

☞ How do you see the goodness and patience of God on display in Jesus lament over Jerusalem? What do you learn about the heart and plan of God through Jesus (response and illustration)? (Read Psalm 147:2; Proverbs 1:24; Deuteronomy 32:11-12)

☞ Israel would reject her King, but what promise did Jesus give her? How does that promise bring hope to you and the whole world?

¹¹¹ cf. 21:9; Psalm 118:26

¹¹² Zechariah 12; Romans 11:25-27



KING'S COMING

Hard Times A Comin'

Matthew 24:1-14

We live in hard times. Just read or watch the news and you will become overwhelmed by the number of stories of tragedy, natural disasters, famines, civil unrest, or violence. All the bad news points to world's brokenness and its need of repair.

Jesus doesn't sugar coat it. While he does promise that there will be an end to the hardship, he says it will only get worse before it gets better. He describes what is to come as "the beginning of sorrows," like the pains of a woman about to give birth. It is enough to make the most confident person freak out or feel concerned for the generation who will have to endure harder days.

What are the signs that the hardest of times are coming or the end is near? Jesus gives a few signs. The first is that **there will be spiritual corruption**. False prophets have always been around and God has historically warned his people of being corrupted spiritually by smooth talkers. In the end, a man posing as a peacemaker will make outlandish promises and lead people astray from Christ.¹¹³

There will also be great calamity. Calamity has always been in the world since the Fall. Just read the Bible from Genesis 3 and you see how man has made a mess of marriage, family, government, and more. Wars, famine, death, and worldwide chaos are a consequence of the curse, however these signs will be accelerated in the end.

The end doesn't end all bad, in fact **there will be a great outpouring of Good News**. In the end, the gospel will be proclaimed to every nation to the ends of the earth.¹¹⁴ People will know that there is a hope they can cling to amidst the chaos. Many will turn to Christ in the world's darkest days. God's mercy and goodness will still shine through despite the hard times to come. The point of Jesus warning is not to be a dooms day spectator, but to be a proclaimer of the good news until he returns.

💬 How does Jesus words make you feel? Why wouldn't Jesus sugar coat the state of the world or the end of it?

💬 How do all the signs of the times point to hope rather than despair? How do you see God's goodness and mercy in the hard times?

💬 How can you have a calm amidst the chaos in the world today?

¹¹³ cf. Revelation 6:1-2; Daniel 9:27; John 5:43

¹¹⁴ cf. Revelation 7:1-8



It's the End of the World as We Know It

Matthew 24:15-51

It is amazing the amount of movies about pandemic, epidemic, catastrophic, even apocalyptic events. These movies depict disasters that wipe out cities, continents and create global chaos. I don't like watching these movies, but they sure do make blockbusters that pack out movie theaters.

Jesus continues his end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it chat. He gives us a into the script of what will happen in those final days also mentioned in Daniel's prophecy. **It is a warning to the people in Israel: Get out there!** There would be many lured to stay because of false messiahs and Jesus troubled by that is kind to help them see this.

Yet as the end draws to a close and carnage has already taken place, **Jesus gives a glimmer of hope: I am coming back!** His return will be sudden, like a flash of lightning. He will come upon the clouds in glory with trumpets blaring and he will gather in the air those who are his believers.

Jesus has the last word and the last act. He is the hero of the day. He will come to the rescue and save the world at the last second. The purpose of prophecy is not to entertain the curious, but to encourage the consecrated. One generation may see the signs, but another may see the events. That will be a difficult day. Thus **Jesus encourages his believers: be ready it won't be long!**

To encourage his believers, Jesus shares three illustrations. First, a budding fig tree will show that summer is near. In other words, they will know the beginning of the end by the signs. Second, as God cared for Noah who saw the signs and events, Jesus will take care of those in the events. Third, Jesus will come as a thief in the night. No one knows the day or hour. No one cannot schedule his return, but we can be certain of it. This is will be a great comfort for those experiencing these tumultuous events.

There are man dooms-day sign seekers. This is not the point of Jesus' chat about the end of the world. The greater emphasis is not on the signs, but on the Savior. Our eyes are to remain on him. We do not know when he will come, but we do know that he will come. Jesus simply encourages us to be alert, watchful and faithful.

💬 Why will many be deceived by false Messiah's in the end? How do the true Messiah's words bring you comfort or encouragement? What comfort will the bring those who will actually face these events? Why didn't God reveal a timetable for these events?

💬 How certain can you be of Jesus' return?



The Wise Five and Foolish Five

Matthew 25:1-13

We are always waiting for more; ready for what's next break. As a kid we would wait 180 days until the end of the school year for the return of summer. As teenagers we can't wait until we're adults so we can have more freedom. As working adults we look forward to the next vacation to have a break from work, then we look forward to retirement when we no longer have to return to work, but instead we can enjoy the fruit of all our labors.

Jesus reminded us to be ready and watching for his return. To help us understand the excitement and goodness surrounding his return he told a story about ten girls ready for marriage waiting for their groom to come and bring them to the wedding feast. In Jesus day, the groom and his wedding party would leave his home to go the bride's home, then bring her back to his house for the wedding feast. Jesus gave the impression that he is the groom that has already claimed his bride and will soon return for her.¹¹⁵

For two thousand years people have been waiting for Jesus to return. Each generation wonders if Jesus would come back during their lifetime. With all the waiting and wishing we can question whether he will really return at all. It is easy to lose patience and hope. It is possible to become lethargic like half the girls who forgot to put oil in their lamps.¹¹⁶ Jesus called these girls foolish because they were unprepared. They not only miss the wedding feast, but the groom doesn't recognize them.

At the end of the story Jesus encourages watchfulness. This doesn't mean that we just stop and look to the sky waiting for Jesus to return, but that we are alert and ready shining brightly with our lives until he does return. Jesus' return is worth waiting for and will be more wonderful than anticipating the return of summer, vacation, or retirement combined.

- Who are the characters in Jesus story? Who do they represent? Why couldn't the five wise girls give their oil to the five foolish girls?
- How does the story of waiting for a bridegroom help you to understand the excitement and goodness surrounding Jesus' return?
- What does it look like to be ready for Jesus return? How can you shine brightly while you wait?

¹¹⁵ The bride here is not the same as the church (cf. Ephesians 5:22ff), but believers in general.

¹¹⁶ The oil for burning reminds us of the special oil used in the tabernacle services (Ex. 27:20–21). Oil is usually a symbol of the Spirit of God, but I wonder if this particular oil is not also a symbol of the Word of God.



Talents and Troubles

Matthew 25:14-30

Every time I saw my great grandfather he would give me a two-dollar bill. It was an odd currency, but very generous. He also encouraged me to use and enjoy them. It's hard to determine how many two-dollar bills I received growing up, but the fact that I was able to put a good chunk down on my college tuition tells me there were a lot.

Jesus tells a similar story about money and how we are to use it. A land owner is going away and he gave three of his servants a generous amount of money according to his ability.¹¹⁷ The servant with the most ability was given five talents; another servant received two talents; and the servant with the least ability received one talent.

When the landowner returned from his journey he found his servants and asked what they did with his talents. The three servants were either categorized as faithful or unfaithful. The faithful servants took the money and put it to work. The unfaithful servant hid the money in the ground. Instead of using it, he buried it! He did not purposely do evil, but by doing nothing, he robbed the master the ability to give an increase. The two faithful men who put their money to work each received the same reward. They started as servants, but their master promoted them to rulers. They were faithful with a few things, so they were trusted with more things. Their faithfulness gave each of them a capacity for greater service and responsibility.

The unfaithful servant was unrewarded. Perhaps he thought his one-talent was unimportant. Perhaps he was afraid he might fail. Or perhaps he feared life and his responsibilities. Whatever the reason, he buried the money to protect it, rather than at least investing it in the bank and earning a little interest. With no risk there was no reward. By avoiding doing anything wrong he failed to do anything right.

What we aren't using for our Master, we are in danger of losing. While we wait for Jesus' return we aren't to be passive. God gives us all a measure of responsibility, some a little and some a lot. What is important is that it is God who gives talent and responsibility. That is a big deal no matter how little it may seem (although just one talent is a huge amount!). **Faithful in a little, God will set you over much.**

💬 How does God give generously even to the one given a little? Why does God expect us to use what he gives us actively and adventurously?

💬 What has God given you to be faithful using?

¹¹⁷ One talent equals about twenty years' wages.



And Finally

Matthew 25:31-46

The average person throughout their lifetime will spend up to five years waiting in lines and queues. Of that roughly six months are waiting at traffic lights. Also, the average person spends about 43 days of their lifetime on hold with automated customer service. That is a lot of waiting which seems like wasted time.

When Jesus told his followers to wait for his return he did not mean that we should sit around and do nothing. Jesus illustrated this by telling a story of the Final Judgment. He took the time of waiting for the Son of Man from useless idleness to the important and selfless care of the neighbor in need.

When Jesus returns he will come as Shepherd King. He will judge the nations between those who are sheep (believers) and goats (unbelievers). The division is as stark as the consequences. The sheep will share in the glory of Jesus' kingdom, but the goats will be thrown into hell reserved for Satan and his angels. How Jesus will divide the two is based upon how each has treated the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner while waiting.

Jesus is very passionate about serving others. He modeled this while he was on earth. He came to serve not to be served. This is an odd mark for a King, let alone God-Man. Yet Jesus gives us a glimpse into the heart and character of God—a heart that he wants to see in his followers. As you serve others you serve God and shine your faith in Jesus.

So the next time your neighbor asks for help or you're waiting at the traffic light remember you are waiting for something greater. As you wait don't just sit, rather see the needy around you and serve them as Jesus would. Watching and waiting is serving.

- 💬 What do you despise waiting for? How is waiting for Jesus difficult?
- 💬 Why does Jesus place so much emphasis on helping needy people while we wait for his return? Why are the needy not to be ignored?
- 💬 Who are the "least important of these" in your life? How can you serve them as if they were Jesus?



KING'S SUFFERING

Good vs. Good-er

Matthew 26:1-13

There are a lot of good things to choose from. For example, choose one from each pair of “good” options: Cookies or ice cream? Beach or mountains? Health or wealth? For some these are tough choices. It’s like choosing between good and good-er.

Jesus attended a gathering at Simon’s house. All was normal until a woman walked in. This would have immediately quieted the crowd and brought all eyeballs onto the woman and Jesus. Her presence was risky if not scandalous. She approached Jesus. He was in the position to dismiss or welcome her. He said nothing. The woman brought with her a bottle of expensive perfume.¹¹⁸ She took it and broke it open. The scent must have filled the room. In a moment of extravagance she poured it over Jesus’ head.

The scene troubled Jesus’ followers. All this time Jesus had talked about serving the needy and poor, he even healed the sick and downtrodden, but now he has allowed this woman to dump perfume on him.¹¹⁹ Jesus’ followers thought it was extravagant and didn’t hold back their tongues from saying so, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.”

Their question was legitimate after all they’ve heard Jesus say and do. In their hearts and minds they were questioning the greater good: give generously to the poor or worship Jesus extravagantly? Jesus didn’t dismiss or discourage either. In response, Jesus told his followers that he would only be with them for a short time, but the poor would be there long after he was gone. In this case, the woman chose correctly. She chose to honor God by honoring Jesus.

Giving to God is always the greater good. In fact, the woman’s worship of Jesus would spread. Jesus said, “What she has done will be told anywhere this good news is preached all over the world. It will be told in memory of her.”

- ☞ What do you learn about what is to happen to Jesus? Why would he give this hint to his followers? How does Matthew give us insight into what is going on behind the scene?
- ☞ Put yourself into the shoes of each character in the story (Simon, disciple, woman, Jesus). What might you be seeing, hearing, thinking, or feeling?
- ☞ How is the woman’s gift and worship of Jesus a picture of proclaiming the good news around the world? What are some extravagant and creative ways you can love to Jesus?

¹¹⁸ The perfume is nard which an oil imported from India. It was often used to anoint the dead. See John 11-12.

¹¹⁹ The scene was like that of a lavished anointing of a king.



Betrayal and Dinner

Matthew 26:14-29

Prisoners on death row will often be offered their choice of a last meal before they are executed. Some have requested a juicy steak, turkey with stuffing, bbq ribs, even eggs with bacon.

Jesus knew his hours on earth were coming to a close. The pieces were coming together. Judas was brought with the priest's silver.¹²⁰ He would soon turn Jesus over to these bloodthirsty men. The bread was dipped. Jesus would soon be betrayed.

Before his betrayal Jesus would enjoy one last meal with his friends. It would be a meal to remember. He had planned this evening ahead of time, in fact, he had eternally prepared for this moment.

At the last dinner with his friends he used two of the most common staples as a visual aid to teach about his mission—the moments that would follow the next 24 hours. First, he took bread and broke it. Jesus had already said that he is the Bread of Life, but as the bread his body would be broken and die on the cross. Second, Jesus took a cup of wine, which would represent the blood he would shed for the forgiveness of their sins.¹²¹ In the agrarian world that Jesus lived this made sense. A lamb was slaughtered and crops are harvested so that humanity can survive. Jesus would be that spiritual bread and sacrificial lamb for humanity.

We still celebrate this meal today. It reminds us of the greatest event in the history of the world. We think about the pain He suffered on the cross in our place. We remember the sacrifice Jesus made to forgive our sins. We anticipate a future celebration with him in heaven. It is a meal worth remembering!

- 💬 If you only had one more day to live who would you like to spend your last meal with? What would you eat?
- 💬 How does this meal correlate with the Passover meal celebrated all over Jerusalem that night? See Exodus 11-12.
- 💬 Why are memorials so important to God? (Joshua 4:1-7) How was Jesus' meal simple, yet memorable? Why do we still celebrate this meal today?

¹²⁰ Thirty silver coins was the amount given to an owner for the loss of a slave (Exodus 21:32). The phrase is also used for the 'wages' of the rejected shepherd (Messiah) in Zechariah 11:12.

¹²¹ cf. Isaiah 53:10-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34



Denial

Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75

When I was 16 years old I went to the DMV to take my road test. I went into the test with confidence after acing my written test. The entire road test I never got one bad mark, but in the end I was denied my license. Why? I was given an automatic disqualification for failure to yield to a pedestrian at a crosswalk. It was a huge bummer and I had to wait more than a month before I could retake the test.

During Jesus' final night with his disciples he said that they would all "fall away." He even cornered Peter and said, "This very night you will deny me three times." Ironically, Peter denied that he would deny Jesus.

What would make someone deny Jesus? There are certainly more than three reasons.

The Bible is chalked full of people that God used in spite of their failures. Abraham was a liar, but God made him the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). Moses was a murderer, but God used him to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt (Exodus 3-4; 12:31-42). King David was an adulterer and a murderer, and yet God said he was "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22). Jesus' closest friends would fail him. But Jesus had big plans for them. Peter would passionately lead the church. The others went on to spread the good news about Jesus and build up the church.

God knows that we all fail sometimes. But He still loves us and has great plans for us. We may even pretend we don't know Jesus and he doesn't give us an automatic disqualification. Yet Jesus still loves us. He still calls us his friend. And he still use us to do amazing things in the world.

💬 Have you ever be denied something? How did this make you feel?

💬 What reasons o people give for denying Jesus?

💬 Read Peter's speech in Acts 2:14-41. These powerful words came from the same man who denied that Jesus was even his friend. If God could use Peter this way after a big failure, don't you think He can use you even when you fail? Why or why not?



A Plea and a Prayer

Matthew 26:36-46

I took my youngest daughter to the doctor to get a shot. She heard from her older sisters that shots hurt. She wasn't looking forward to going to the doctor to get her own. The drive to the doctor was full of questions, tears and some fears. Still in the doctor's office she was quiet, but I could tell she'd rather be somewhere else. She bravely received the shot knowing that I was with her as her father.

We find Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane, which is an ancient olive grove. It was nighttime. The disciples were exhausted, but Jesus could not sleep. His mind was full of what was to come. He knew that in just a few hours, he would face death. He knew what he was in for. The pain. The suffering.

Jesus lived to die. It's why he came to earth as a human in the first place: to become the ultimate Sacrifice and save us from our sins. Yet as the moment drew near and torture was only hours away his humanity took on words. He was deeply troubled and said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

The end was coming, and it will be anything but easy. As Jesus prayed, He plead with his Father, "If there be any other way . . ." Jesus wasn't looking for a way out or another way. He was simply being honest about what he felt as he considered what was going to happen to him. He craved God as his companion in the distress.

Still he trusted his Father and said, "Your will be done." He weighed the cost, the pain, and the suffering. There was no doubt that he would take the cup of wrath and drink it.

- 💬 What is a difficult situation you had to endure knowingly? How did God encourage you through that situation? What did you learn from it?
- 💬 How do you see the humanity of Jesus in his garden pleas? Read Hebrews 5:7-9.
- 💬 How does this prayer encourage you, even in pain or distress? What does it reveal about Jesus' relationship with the Father? Or your relationship to God in prayer?



Arrested

Matthew 26:47-56

What if you were innocent. You committed no crime. But there are police at your door to arrest you and a friend (or so you thought) is standing there pointing at as if you did it, how would you respond? Normally, people would run or deny, “I did what? I did no such thing! You got it all wrong. I am innocent. I am being set up! This man is a liar.”

Judas is a name synonymous with betrayal. Judas was one of the twelve disciples. He had lived with Jesus, walked with him for thousands of miles throughout Israel, eaten with him, laughed with him. How could one of Jesus’ closest friends betray him?

Jesus knew why. Jesus already knew what was going to happen. It was all part of God’s plan all along. Judas had one job and it was to betray Jesus. In fact, during dinner earlier that night Jesus had told Judas, “What you are about to do, do quickly” (John 13:27).

Nobody would dare name their baby Judas, it would be like naming a little girl Jezebel. The name has bad connotations to it. Tied to the name of Judas was Jesus’ betrayal and arrest, which would lead to his trial and death. We may wonder what God is up to and how he will work thing out for good. If we step back and see the whole picture, then Judas’ role makes sense.

What is amazing is Jesus’ response. He says nothing. He doesn’t resist. He isn’t powerless. He knows this is part of God’s plan. Although he is innocent, his innocence is key. As the Scriptures said a spotless lamb must die for betrayers and sinners like Judas and us.

- 💬 Have you ever been convicted of something you never did? How did that make you feel?
- 💬 How does God even use betrayal and evil as part of his plan? What surprises you about God’s plan here?
- 💬 How is Judas’ story a small piece of a greater story God is writing? How do you see the puzzle pieces coming together in these last chapters of Matthew?



Interrogated

Matthew 26:57-68

You may have heard it said that it is possible to lose the battle but win the war. Others have said, pick your battles or some battles just aren't worth battling.

Jesus was brought before the high priest, Caiaphas. The interrogation of Jesus began. The top religious leaders had picked a fight. They came in with all guns locked and loaded. They falsely accused Jesus of all sorts of things, but they tried to catch him saying that he would destroy God's temple, then saying he was God so they could have him arrested and tried by the Roman Government for treason and vandalism.

Why didn't Jesus engage in the fight? Jesus had calmed storms. He had raised people from the dead. He had fed thousands with a small sack lunch. When questioned by the high priest, Jesus could have slammed down his knowledge of Scripture like he had in the past. Instead, Jesus was silent. He allowed the high priest to ask Him humiliating questions. He allowed people to spit on him, hit him and slap him. Why? Because Jesus knew he had a bigger war to fight and win.

Jesus was in an unseen battle with the ruler of the world, Satan. Jesus came to fight sin, save the world, die, and rise from the grave. There was a bigger fight going on. Jesus had his sights on winning the cosmic battle for your life.

You may be interrogated for your faith. Sometimes they might be angry and heated. They may want to pick a fight with you and question why you would believe that Jesus is the Son of God. This is not a fight you may win, but only God can convince a man.

- What is the importance of Jesus title the Son of God? What did Jesus mean when he said he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days?
- How was the religious mob trying to trap Jesus? What would this prove in their minds? What truths were they failing to recognize?
- What wisdom do you learn from Jesus by not fighting back the angry mob? (Isaiah 53:7-8) Why is it important to consider the bigger picture in the midst of battles?



Failure

Matthew 26:69-75

Convictions are things you stand up for no matter what. Even if the crowd goes one way you go the other. However, sometimes our convictions are misaligned or misguided. We may think to ourselves, “I will never do that” or “I will always be this,” but within a unique or difficult situation we may find that our convictions fail us.

Peter was convinced that Jesus would always be with him. He saw that Jesus was being set up and falsely accused. He loved Jesus. His conviction led him to cut off the ear of the soldier as Jesus was being arrested. Was Peter defending Jesus? Was he afraid of being arrested too? We aren’t given that information.

As Peter followed Jesus to the trial, he tried to lay low and be anonymous. When people in the crowd recognized him and they questioned his connections to Jesus he denied that he even knew Jesus.¹²² And just as Jesus predicted,¹²³ the rooster crowed. After Peter realized what he had done, “he went outside and wept bitterly.” The thought that he had failed Jesus was a far worse punishment than he would have gotten even if he had been thrown into jail.

Peter thought of himself as a failure, a pathetic person. Under pressure Peter blows it. His convictions get tossed out the window. He is devastated. So much so that he called curses upon himself and flees the scene.

There is good reason the story ends with Peter’s remorse, not his restoration. Remorse is the preparation ground for restoration. Peter’s failure would lead him to an even greater conviction about Jesus and greater courage to boldly proclaim Jesus until the day he died.

- What are some convictions you have? What “I will never” or “I will always” define your convictions?
- Have you ever found yourself in Peter’s shoes denying your convictions? How can you relate to Peter’s remorse?
- Why is remorse the preparation grounds for restoration?

¹²² It is interesting that two of the three people who questioned Peter were servant girls. These innocent and lowly girls who would have little sway in the trial. Nonetheless Peter denies Jesus.

¹²³ cf. 6:30-35



Guilt and Shame

Matthew 27:1-10

Maybe you've heard it said before that someone has a "skeleton in the closet." It is an old English phrase that was used to describe someone with a hidden guilt or shame they would rather keep hidden. It evokes the idea of someone having a corpse concealed in their home so long that it had decomposed to its bones.

Guilt and shame can cause us to do strange things. If left alone they will eat and destroy its prey from the inside out, like maggots or vultures to a corpse. Soon all that is left is bones. Now guilt and shame both like to hide in dark places and destroy, but they have different links. Guilt is linked to *behavior* while shame is linked to *self*. Guilt says "I did something bad", but shame says "I am bad."

Guilt and shame is what eventually hung Judas Iscariot. He did something bad by betraying Jesus. He tried to make it right by throwing the blood money back at the religious leaders faces. He should have then ran to Jesus, rather he punished himself—a permanent response to a temporary problem. But what if Judas had gone to Jesus instead and said, "Forgive me for what I've done!" Surely Jesus would have forgiven him. Maybe given another chance to be a disciple. He might have gone on to be a valuable member of the first church—a missionary or a preacher like the other disciples. We will never know because he ended his life too short swallowed up in his guilt, shame and despair leading to his suicide.

Jesus often used people who messed up and blown it. Look at Peter, Paul, Abraham, Moses, David, and many others! Going back to Peter, we see a stark comparison between Peter and Judas' responses to guilt and shame. Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. But for him it was a temporary failure. He was forgiven and restored,¹²⁴ then he went on to be the head of the first church.

There is hope. Before guilt and shame become bones buried in darkness,¹²⁵ bring it into the light that it might be healed and restored. Confession is the remedy for shame and repentance is the remedy for guilt. Shame and guilt can destroy, but confession and repentance brings new life, forgiveness, and a fresh beginning.

💬 What is the difference between guilt and shame? How does God use both for good?

💬 How have you seen guilt and shame eat and destroy you or others around you? Why is it important to bring guilt and shame into the light?

¹²⁴ John 21:15-25; Luke 22:32

¹²⁵ There may be a connection between Jeremiah 18:1-19:13 and 32 and the Potter's Field. Also see, Zechariah 11:12-13 and Acts 1:18-19.



Trial

Matthew 27:11-31

John Adams once said, “Facts are stubborn things, but our minds are even more stubborn.” The religious leaders and crowds had all the facts they needed to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, but they stubbornly ignored the facts and swayed the crowds to turn against Jesus. It was Black Friday madness.

Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor overseeing the province of Israel. Pilate was no fool. He saw Jesus’ innocence, but he also saw the crowd’s indignation. He wanted to keep the peace and his job. Therefore he gave the people a choice: Barabbas or Jesus. Despite Barabbas’ reputation as a murderer they requested his freedom over Jesus. In the end, Pilate opted to keep peace, washed his hands clean from controversy, and in a miscarriage of justice handed Jesus to the crowd to be crucified. Trial over.

How quickly the tide turns. Just a week before the crowds cheered Jesus into Jerusalem as king, now they were chanting for his death and mocked his kingship. He was greeted like a hero, now he is compared to a vile criminal. Where were the 5,000 people he fed on the hillside? Where were the 10 lepers he healed? Lazarus? Or what about the 12 disciples? Despite all the good Jesus did, he said those closest to him in the end would abandon him and they did. No one in the crowd cried, “Free Jesus!”

If you were in the crowd, then you would have likely followed the crowd. Don’t think you wouldn’t have been swayed by the crowd. However, in our current era of social media and herd mentality you have a choice. Surround yourself with brothers and sisters those who value truth, justice, and goodness. Stick to the facts. Honor Jesus as King and stand up for him, even when you face your own trials.

- How did the religious leaders sway the crowds so quickly? Why didn’t Pilate give Jesus a fair trial? You may notice that Jesus says very little, why?
- You might ask yourself, what you would have done if you were in the crowd, but do you know that Jesus would have done this for you, even if you hadn’t been in the crowd shouting His name? How are you speaking up for him today?
- Have you ever been “under trial” for your faith in Jesus? What do you learn from Jesus under trial?



Good Friday

Matthew 27:32-56

In today's vernacular when someone says 'sick' it can mean 'awesome' or when someone says 'wicked' it can mean 'wonderful'. How can something bad be good? Some may think that about Good Friday. Why was the day Jesus died called Good Friday? What's so good about that?

Before we answer that question let's understand what happened the Friday Jesus died. He's asked to carry his own cross to the crucifixion. People passing by made fun of him. Soldiers made bets over his clothes. The religious leaders mocked him as a rejected king. The other criminals crucified next to him belittled him. God had turned his back on his Son.¹²⁶ He was utterly and totally rejected.

That was when this Friday shifted. The sky grew dark. The earth shook and rocks split apart. People thought Elijah would break out of the heavens to rescue Jesus. But Jesus in total control of his death gave up his spirit and died. Then two huge things happened as Jesus died on the cross. First, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Before this happened, the temple curtain was there to keep anybody who wasn't a special kind of priest from talking directly to God. When God miraculously tore apart the curtain, it meant that everyone could now have a personal relationship with God.

Second, "tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs." This must have been a spooky sight as the bodies entered Jerusalem and were seen by many. What is remarkable about this is that dead people were raised to life. This shows what will happen to us if we believe in Jesus as our Savior. We have the hope that when we die one day; we will be raised to life with him.

All this makes Good Friday good, but that is not the most good part. In the crowd there was a terrified soldier who summed up what was seen that Friday, "Truly this was the Son of God!" In that moment, he and the world realized this man Jesus was no ordinary man, but the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world. And this very bad and gruesome Friday turned into the most Good Friday ever.

💬 What is so good about Good Friday? Why is it good for you?

💬 How do the other Gospels bring more color to the Good Friday story? (see Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19)

💬 Imagine yourself there that Friday near Golgotha. Write or draw how that event would have made you feel?

¹²⁶ The passion echoes back to Psalm 22 and 69.



Tomb

Matthew 27:57-66

The past three years in Chad, Africa our home has been located only a block from a graveyard. We frequently see families and friends bringing their loved ones wrapped in burial clothe and laying them in the freshly dug ground. It isn't fancy. Only small mounds and rocks mark the places where they are buried.

When Jesus was buried a wealthy man asked to have his body and buried him in a new tomb, which was cut out of rock. This man had a rich love for Jesus. He laid Jesus in the tomb with burial clothe, then had heavy rock moved in front of the entrance of the tomb.

The next day the religious leaders came to Pilate. They weren't finished trying to squelch the Jesus movement because they remembered Jesus hinted that he would rise from the grave after three days. To prevent an even bigger scandal they recommended that Pilate have the tomb sealed and secured with guards day and night. Maximum security would prevent any of the disciples from coming in the middle of the night and stealing the body of Jesus.

If Jesus would miraculously rise from the dead, then all his claims of being the Messiah would be true and the religious leaders would be seen as frauds. This is what they were trying to prevent, but nothing could prepare them for what would happen the next day as the sun dawned.

💬 What do you learn about burials during Jesus day from Matthew?

💬 Why would the religious leaders have called Jesus and imposter? What scandal were they trying to prevent? What does Pilates move tell you about what he feared along with the religious leaders feared?

💬 What does the two Mary's position tell you about what they anticipated?



KING'S RISING

Resurrection

Matthew 28:1-15

The sun came up. A new day and era dawned. The world would be forever changed.

The guards at the tomb of Jesus shouted in fear as they felt the ground shake and saw an angel shining brightly before them. Who wouldn't? And where was the angel? He was sitting on the stone that rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. The soldiers fled the scene and found the religious leaders and told them what happened. The leaders manufactured a lie that the disciples stole Jesus body. Ironically, it's a lie that they hold to this day.

The two Mary's also shouted, but they shouted with joy, "He is alive!" They ran as fast as they could. Hearts still pounding and eyes wide open. As they entered the home where the disciples were gathered they shouted, "He's alive! The angels said it!" One could imagine the disciples leaped up from their mournful slumber and shouted too.

The tomb of Jesus. Empty. The grave could not keep him. Death could not hold him. Sin could not conquer him. Hope was given a man. Jesus. Alive!

Jesus had been in a battle for the souls of men while he walked the earth. He battled against the religious leaders, against demons, against disease, against faithless friends and foes. Jesus endured some dark days. Like the day Satan tested him in the wilderness. The day his friend John the Baptist was beheaded. The day the people shouted, "Crucify him!" But this day, **Resurrection Sunday, the sun shined on the brightest day in history.** Jesus won the battle.

- What do you imagine resurrection morning being like? Put yourself in the shoes of the guards, women, and disciples. What would you be thinking or feeling?
- Why are the stories of the disciples and guards so opposite? What does this tell us about the human heart?
- What is the importance of this moment that's worth shouting about? Why does the resurrection matter for Jesus? For you?



Mission

Matthew 28:16-20

Missioned accomplished. Jesus had risen from the dead. Evil conquered. Death defeated. Now what?

Likely the disciples had this thought. But Jesus knew the mission on earth wasn't finished, in fact, for the disciples it had just begun. Jesus spent his last moments on earth with his disciple. He had some important words for them. He had an important mission for them.

Their mission was to go into all the world and teach about Jesus. These men lived with Jesus. Ate with Jesus. Walked with Jesus. Taught by Jesus. They knew all about Jesus. Now the world needed to hear about Jesus too.

Their mission was to go make more followers of Jesus. They took this mission seriously. You can read all about it the Acts of the Apostles. The message spread everywhere. And everywhere they went new followers were born.

This mission wasn't limited to Jesus' disciples only. It is your mission too. Many still need to hear about Jesus and what he did. You and I can replicate Matthew's message (or Mark, Luke or John's) and share it to the ends of the earth.

Jesus is still worthy of worship. There are so many wonderful things to share about Jesus. But if this mission makes you afraid, remember what Jesus said to his disciples and he says to you, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- 💬 What was the final mission of Jesus to his followers? Why is it your mission too?
- 💬 As you look back on the message of Matthew, what parts of the message are important to share with others? What about his birth, sermons, miracles, suffering, death and resurrection?
- 💬 What promise did Jesus give to his disciples? Why is that promise so powerful? How is it powerful to you too?



APPENDIX A: A MINI SYNOPSIS OF MATTHEW

It has taken our family more than 3 months to walk through the Gospel of Matthew. While we'd recommend a straight-through-no-stopping read to get the panoramic view, we also see the tremendous value of taking our time to smell the flowers. While Matthew itself is a short synopsis on Jesus' life, there is also a lot to take in.

What is it about?

Jesus is the Savior King. Matthew shows his readers how Jesus is the promised Messiah and King of Israel who will restore them fulfilling the Old Testament predictions. Matthew is bookended with God's promised presence coming into the world to save the world: called *Immanuel* or "God with us" (1:23) and ends with Jesus saying, "I will be with you always." (28:20)

Who wrote it?

This may seem obvious. Matthew. He was a Jewish tax collector.¹²⁷ He became one of the original twelve followers of Jesus after Jesus approached his tax table and asked Matthew to follow him. Matthew gave up wealth and a bad reputation. He followed Jesus. He saw Jesus perform miracles and heard his preaching.

Why was it written?

Matthew knew Jews, since he was a Jew. He knew Jesus expected a spiritual and political Messiah who would deliver them from sin and Rome. So he wrote to convince the Jews that Jesus fulfilled what the OT said about the Messiah. He emphasized Jesus role as King and Savior of the world.

"Do you think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." — Matthew 5:17

How is it important today?

Matthew tells us about Jesus from someone who knew Jesus well. The better you know Jesus the better you know how to follow him.

30 AD Jesus begins his ministry, calls Matthew to follow him.

55-65 AD Matthew write about the life and ministry of Jesus.

33 AD Jesus is crucified and resurrected from the dead.

¹²⁷ It was a hated job because he made allegiance with the Roman government who had muscled its way into Israel. This rubbed wrong with the religious class because they had hopes of a Messiah who would come to free them of their oppression.



APPENDIX B: JESUS THE SAVIOR KING

Matthew makes no mistake when he hints at Jesus being *Messiah* or the true **anointed King of Israel**. It is easy to miss and misread all these references. Messiah doesn't just mean Jesus is the Savior. While that is true, until we understand Messiah as meaning *King* to a Jew, we won't quite see Matthew's words in their proper light.

A Promised King

Matthew places Jesus as 'the son of David' or the true heir to the promise declared in 2 Samuel 7, that there would always be a king to sit on David's throne. Matthew chooses to emphasize in his genealogy **tracing Jesus down the line of kings** who sat on David's throne.¹²⁸

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." — Matthew 1:1, cf. v20

A Proclaimed King

Matthew uses the title *Christ* no less than 17 times.¹²⁹ They are concentrated at beginning and end of the book. Here are a few highlights:

- ▶ Wise men from the east come look the child who is 'the **King** of the Jews' (2:2).
- ▶ A new king is blessed by the Levite prophet and the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon him to confirm his call (3:16; cf. 1 Samuel 10:16).
- ▶ Jesus proclaims a '**Kingdom**' is at hand (4:17, 23).
- ▶ Jesus fulfills various Messianic prophecies (8:17).
- ▶ Two men come out calling Jesus "**Son of David** (9:27)
- ▶ Jesus begins to refer to the people as 'sheep without a shepherd' (9:36). This phrase goes back to the anointing of Joshua (Num 27:17), but repeat throughout the OT and culminate in Ezekiel's prophecy:

"And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken." - Ezekiel 34:23-24

- ▶ Jesus gives the disciples 'Authority' and sends them out to preach the '**Kingdom**' bringing in lost sheep (10:6)

¹²⁸ 'Son of God' is also a very common term for Jesus throughout Matthew. It also links back to promises to David (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7).

¹²⁹ Compared with Luke (12x's, Mark (8x's) and John (19x's).



- ▶ The crowd declare "Could this perhaps be the **Son of David?**" (12:22-23) after Jesus heals people.
- ▶ A woman calls upon Jesus, "Have pity on me, Lord, **Son of David!**" (15:22)
- ▶ Peter declares, "You are the **Christ**, the Son of the living God!" (16:15) and from here on Jesus' sights are set on Jerusalem, the "**city of the great King**" (5:35).
- ▶ Two blind men ask for mercy from Jesus, the "**Son of David**" (20:29)

A Crucified King

During the passion week Jesus kingship is admired and mocked. This no less makes him king, but Matthew makes reference to both.

- ▶ Jesus enters Jerusalem in kingly style: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold! **Your king comes** to you gentle and mounted on a donkey'" (21:5) and the people reinforce it, "Hosanna to the **Son of David!**" (21:9)
- ▶ Jesus teaches in the temple and the children shout out "Hosanna to the **Son of David!**" (21:15)
- ▶ Jesus teaches about the '**son of a king**' giving a wedding feast referring to himself (22:21)
- ▶ Jesus threatens the **destruction and rebuilding of the temple**, which is the proper role of the 'Son of David' given in 2 Samuel 7, for **David is not authorised to tear down the tent of God and build a temple, but the Son of David is.**
- ▶ Jesus is '**anointed**' with oil, which is the sign done over new kings.
- ▶ Pilate's first question is "Are you **King of the Jews?**" (27:11, 21) and Jesus affirms it.
- ▶ Soldiers make Jesus a mock crown and robe, then mock him, "**King of the Jews!**" (27:28)
- ▶ A sign on the cross above Jesus head reads, "**This is Jesus, King of the Jews**" (27:37)

Conclusion

The theme of "Jesus as King" in the gospel of Matthew is inescapable. Matthew does not bring most of these claims from Jesus himself, but rather quotes others and explain situations in such a way as to emphasize his kingly credentials.



APPENDIX C: STORIES FROM THE KING ABOUT THE KINGDOM

No one retold more of Jesus' stories than Matthew. And most of the stories he retold are Jesus' stories of the Kingdom of Heaven.

SCRIPTURE & STORY	MEANING
The Sower Matthew 13:1-23	The King grows and separates his people on how they hear the Word. The kingdom consists only of fruit bearing.
The Wheat and Tares Matthew 13:24-30	The King is patient and wise. The Kingdom contains unexpected citizens.
The Mustard Seed Matthew 13:31-32	The Kingdom grows vast and unexpectedly.
The Leaven Matthew 13:33	The Kingdom grows vast and unexpectedly.
The Hidden Treasure Matthew 13:44	The Kingdom costs you everything.
The Pearl of Great Price Matthew 13:45-46	The Kingdom costs you everything.
The Drag Net Matthew 13:47-50	The King gathers and separates his people.
The Debtor Matthew 18:23-35	The King is forgiving and merciful.
The Workers in the Vineyard Matthew 20:1-19	The King is perfectly right, fair and gracious.
The Marriage Feast Matthew 22:1-14	The King invites everyone but requires proper attire to attend.
The Ten Virgins Matthew 25:1-13	The King will return at any moment. Be ready.
The Talents Matthew 25:14-30	The King admires your usefulness while you wait for him to return.



APPENDIX D: GEOGRAPHICAL FLOW IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

1

BETHLEHEM

Birth Ch.1-2

Beginnings Ch.3:1-4:11

2

CAPERNAUM

Messages Ch.5-7

Miracles Pt.1 Ch.8-10

Mission Ch.11-12

Mystery Ch.13

Miracles, Pt.2 Ch.14-15

Motive, Pt.1 Ch.16-18

3

TRAVELING

Motive, Pt.2 Ch.19-20

4

JERUSALEM

Welcoming Ch.21-23

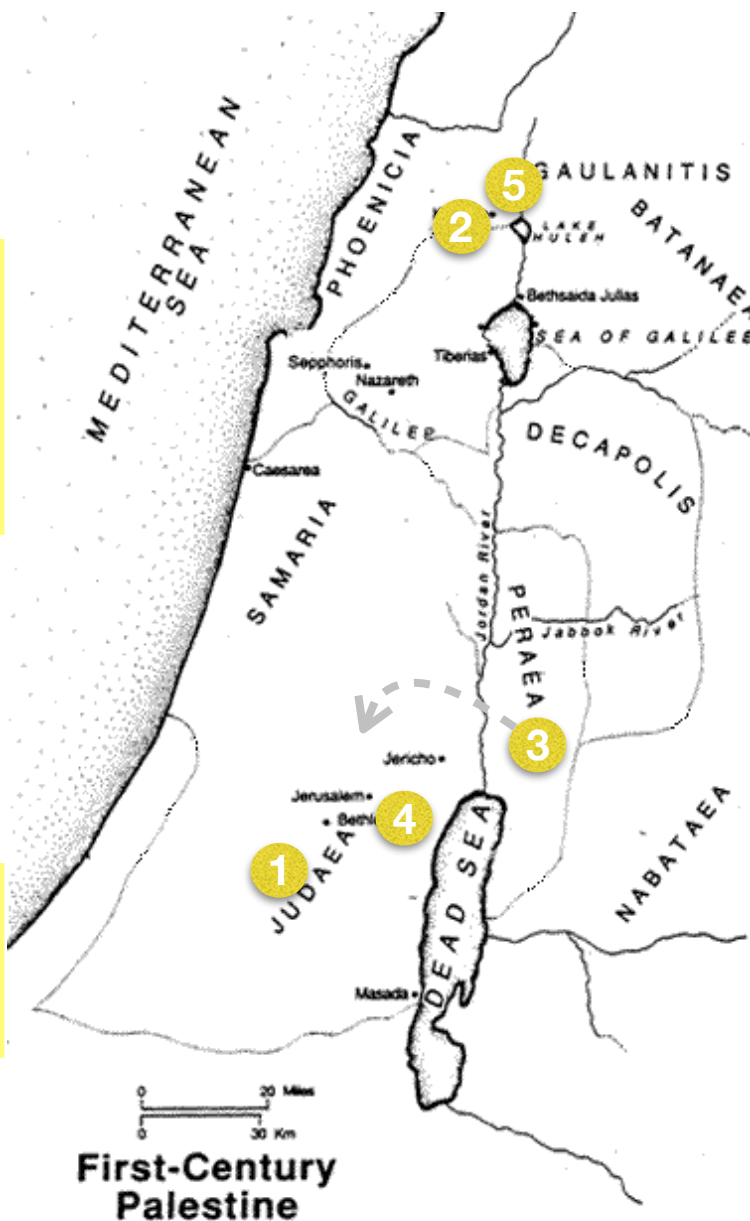
Coming Ch.24-25

Suffering Ch.26-27

5

GALILEE

Rising Ch.28





APPENDIX E: OT FORECASTS CRUCIFIXION

Meteorologist give weather forecasts predicting what the weather will be like tomorrow or next week. People complain that the weather man's forecasts are not entirely accurate. In the Old Testament were are prophets who gave specific forecasts predicting the crucifixion of the Messiah. These forecast were 100% accurate unlike weather forecasts.

OT FORECAST	MATTHEWS FULFILLMENT
A close friend will betray him. Psalms 41:9	Judas betrays Jesus. Matthew 10:4; 26:14-16, 23-25, 47-49
He will be sold for 30 pieces of silver and the money will be given to a potter. Zechariah 11:12-13	Judas gets 30 pieces of silver for betraying Jesus; later the money is used to buy a potter's field. Matthew 26:14-15; 27:3-10
Sheep will scatter when the shepherd is struck. Zechariah 13:7	Disciples scatter when Jesus is arrested. Matthew 26:31, 56
False witness will accuse him. Psalms 27:12; 35:11	False witness accuse Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Matthew 26:59-61
He will be mocked, beaten and spit on. Isaiah 50:6	Jesus was mocked, beaten, slapped, flogged and spit on by priests and soldiers. Matthew 26:67-68; 27:26-31
He will remain silent when oppressed. Isaiah 53:7	Jesus is silent before Pilate. Matthew 27:13-14
He will be given vinegar and gall. Psalms 69:21	Jesus refuses wine drink before crucifixion; he drinks wine vinegar on the cross. Matthew 27:34, 48
He will die among criminals. Isaiah 53:12	Jesus is crucified between two criminals. Matthew 27:38
His clothes will be divided up and lots cast for them. Psalms 22:18	Soldiers divide Jesus' clothes by casting lots. Matthew 27:35
Enemies will hurl insults and mock him. Psalms 22:6-8; 109:25	People mock Jesus while on the cross. Matthew 27:35
God will forsake him. Psalms 22:1	Jesus cries out asking why God has forsaken him. Matthew 27:46
He will be buried with the rich. Isaiah 53:9	Jesus is buried in a rich man's tomb. Matthew 27:57-60



APPENDIX F: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE

These are how events transpired during the week Jesus was crucified.

Matthew 21-28

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Crowds cheer Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. <i>Palm Sunday</i> 21:1-11 ----- Jesus raises from the dead; Empty Tomb; Jesus appears to disciples. <i>Easter Sunday</i> Ch. 28	Jesus enters the temple and turns over the vendor's tables. 21:12-46	Jesus confronts the religious leaders hypocrisy. Ch. 23-25	Judas is bribed to betray Jesus. 26:14-16	The Last Supper; Judas betrays Jesus; Peter denies Jesus. 26:17-75	Priests rally the crowds to chant, "Crucify him!"; Jesus is crucified. He is buried. 27:1-61	Tomb sealed and guards set at the tomb. 27:62-66



08:00

Pilate condemns Jesus to death. **27:24-26**

09:00

Jesus is crucified. **27:32-44**

12:00

Darkness covers the land. **27:45**

15:00

Jesus dies. **27:46-56**

18:00

Jesus buried in a tomb. **27:57-60**

